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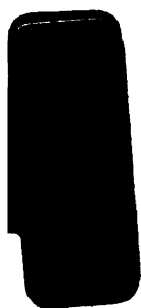
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‘The air was still and clear, with the invigorating freshness that belongs to early autumn days ; and they walked swiftly along, revelling in the bright atmosphere and beautiful colouring of all around.’—*Page 155.*



# JOYFUL THROUGH HOPE

A STORY

BY

BLANCHE A. L. GARVOCK

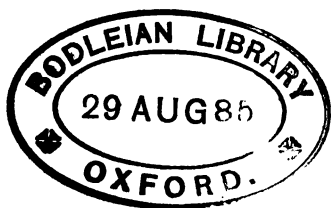
'Go forth! Firm Faith on every heart,  
Bright Hope on every helm,  
Through that shall pierce no fiery dart,  
And this no fear o'erwhelm!'



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# JOYFUL THROUGH HOPE.

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## CHAPTER I.

‘Summer suns are glowing  
Over land and sea,  
Happy light is flowing,  
Bountiful and free ;  
Everything rejoices  
In the mellow rays,  
All earth’s thousand voices  
Swell the psalm of praise.’

BISHOP WALSHAM HOW.

‘JESSIE, are you ever coming? We have got no flowers yet for Hope’s room, and it’s getting quite late.’

A small, slight, dark-eyed girl of sixteen, with a quiet, sensible expression, glanced up from the table where she was drawing at her tall unformed-looking sister of fourteen, whose merry face, under a large garden-hat, had just appeared inside the schoolroom door.

‘Wait a minute—I shall have finished this directly.’

Perceiving that it was no use fidgeting, Ada went to the piano, and sitting down all askew on the music-

stool, played what she termed a 'jig,' thereby causing Jessie to exclaim :

'There you are again, Ada! I really quite dislike the holidays; for you have nothing to do, and at every odd moment you begin strumming on the piano. It's quite a misfortune that you can play by heart so easily.'

Thus rebuked, Ada betook herself to the window, and planting her elbows on the outer ledge, surveyed the prospect, though truly she cannot have found anything new or exciting in the scene, considering that she had been familiar with it all her life.

Badgery Court was a large, square, hospitable-looking house, with one projecting wing. It was built of reddish-coloured stone, and had three stories, the rooms in the topmost of which were attics with projecting windows in the high, sloping roof. The school-room was on the first floor—a corner room, with windows looking in two directions; and from her present point of observation Ada had a fairly extensive view. In front, she looked across the smooth, level lawn, with a fine cedar at each end, and the broken ground of the park beyond, which descended gradually to where, on either side of the lodge-gate, a low stone wall separated it from the road that ran through the quiet little village. On the farther side of the road the cottages clustered or straggled up the hillside behind, which was crowned by a gray church-tower. The view from the other window was over the flower-garden, and extensive shrubberies and large

walled kitchen-garden, with the park beyond, which, though not a large one, stretched farther on this side than to the front, and was exceedingly picturesque, while, forming a background to the whole, rose the heath-covered Quantock Hills, with deep green 'combes' running up their sides.

Ada leant out of window for some minutes, till Jessie announced that her sketch was finished, when the two young sisters ran off into the garden to gather flowers.

'I wish Mr. Fenwick wasn't coming,' observed Jessie, as they returned to the house with their spoils.

'Daddy long-legs? Why do you mind him?'

'Really, Ada, you must not call him that,' replied Jessie, trying to look and speak very severely. 'You will be saying it to his face, you know, if you don't take care; and besides, it's such a very free-and-easy way of speaking of him.'

'Well, the blame lies at Arthur's door for originating the name and then telling it to me,' returned Ada.

'Arthur is a scamp,' Jessie replied soberly.

'Yes, don't you think him so?' Ada rejoined, with a saucy tone and look.

'You are so tough I can make no impression on you,' said Jessie, laughing, but half vexed. 'However, by the time you are as old as I am, I hope you will have learnt to consider proprieties a little more.'

'But why don't you like the young youth?' inquired Ada, returning to the charge.

'Worse and worse!' exclaimed Jessie, in despair at her incorrigible sister. 'I do like him, but I'm shy of

him; I shall let you do the talking. Now, I suppose some of these roses had better go into the drawing-room.'

Meanwhile, a train was speeding along in the direction of Badgery. The only occupants of one of the second-class carriages were a young man of clerical appearance in the corner by one window and a young lady at the farther end in the opposite corner. He had entered the carriage at a junction lately passed, and after settling himself and cutting the pages of the *Guardian*, had glanced at the girl in the farther corner, and finding in her appearance something which attracted him, had unobtrusively prolonged his survey.

It was a fresh, fair young face that he saw, very sweet and sensible in its expression; the features too irregular to give it any claim to beauty, but with the attractions of clear, softly shaded eyes of a rather light hazel, and brown hair with a glint of gold in it, coiled in thick, glossy braids round the small, well-formed head. She seemed to be about the middle height, rounded and easy in figure, and with an unmistakably ladylike air about her—from the simple holland gown and jacket and brown straw hat, to the twisted gold and hair brooch that secured the muslin handkerchief round her throat.

'That is the quietest, most simply happy face I've seen for a long time,' was Walter Fenwick's verdict as he watched her looking out at the meadows, orchards, and hills they passed, not like a stranger, but as if she were recognising old friends in them. 'Comes from

London, I see,' he went on to himself, as he saw a label stamp 'Paddington' below the initials 'H. M. M.' on the desk by her side. 'Well, she looks wonderfully fresh, if she has been there in this heat.'

But, becoming now somewhat alarmed lest the object of his attention should discover the scrutiny to which she was being subjected, he turned his eyes and thoughts to his paper. 'Besides,' he said to himself, 'she may want to examine me, though she won't find anything so attractive in this quarter!' and his eyes twinkled with suppressed merriment.

Unknown to himself, however, his companion had already made her observations, when he had first entered the carriage, and had been engaged in settling himself and unfolding his paper. The face she saw was rather long, thin and sallow, with a clever but defective mouth, straight, finely chiselled nose and penetrating blue eyes, deep-set below the square, lofty brow, over which—when the soft clerical hat had been removed—a wave of loose light-brown hair fell in rather an untidy fashion.

'I like that face,' was the girl's mental decision, 'Decidedly clever, and so earnest and thoughtful. How the corners of his mouth are twitching! I wonder what he sees in the *Guardian* that amuses him!'

The train puffed on through the hills and valleys—it was a sleepy sort of train, that stopped at all the little stations, and dawdled about there while the

driver and guard gossiped with the station-master—but at last it pulled up at a very small station, and the young clergyman clapped his hat on his head, gathered up his overcoat and paper, and opened the door, when he perceived, to his surprise, that his companion had also risen and was collecting her possessions. He descended from the carriage, and was turning to offer her assistance, when a tall figure, in the dress of a country gentleman, but with a certain military air, came up, exclaiming:

‘Ah, Fenwick, here you are!’ adding, ‘I’m expecting a young lady by this train, too. Why, here she is!’—as the girl already described appeared at the carriage-door. ‘Well, Hope, I was wondering where you were!’

He took her desk from her, and gave her his hand, as she sprang lightly to the platform.

‘So, unknown to each other, you have been journeying to the same destination? As you are still strangers to each other, I must introduce you. Mr. Fenwick—Miss Milford.’

Both bowed, with a slightly amused smile, on finding that, after having formed their opinions of each other from outward appearance, they would now be in a position to become more closely acquainted.

Outside the station, a well-appointed waggonette, with a pair of handsome dark chestnut horses, was standing.

‘Hope, will you come up in front with me?’ asked Colonel Lester.



‘Yes; that is always my place, isn’t it?’ she replied, and mounted nimbly to the driving-seat.

There was a look of suppressed amusement on her face, as she saw Mr. Fenwick clambering into the carriage. ‘Clambering’ is the only word by which his movements can be described; for he was one of those tall, long-limbed, bony men, all of whose joints seem loose in their sockets, and who seem never to know what to do with their legs and arms.

Colonel Lester took the reins, and they drove off. Hope Milford looked at all they passed with an eager delight, exclaiming at the flowers and different country sights almost like a child. Walter Fenwick was surprised to see how much her appearance changed when she spoke.

‘So much more girlish-looking,’ he said to himself, ‘and merry instead of grave, with those bright smiles chasing each other over her face.’

‘You know this country, apparently, Miss Milford?’ he said, perceiving how she recognised all the landmarks they passed.

‘Oh yes,’ replied she quickly. ‘Badgery and all around have been known to me for years. Is this your first visit?’

‘No; I belong to these parts now. My curacy is at Avenham, which I suppose you know.’

‘I should think so! And Mr. Wise is your Vicar, then?’

‘Yes.’

Hope’s face asked the next question.

‘Then, if you live here, why are you come to stay at Badgery?’

Colonel Lester answered it for her.

‘You have just come in for a missionary meeting we are going to have for the parish to-morrow. We have not been able to procure a ‘live missionary;’ but Mr. Fenwick has a sister married to one in North America, and so we have persuaded him to prolong his holiday for two nights, and tell us all that he has heard from her.’

‘You are to be a “deputation,” then?’ said Hope, smiling. ‘How nice it must be to have missionary relations!’

‘Yes, it is very interesting; and one feels a sort of reflected honour, if I may say so, from being connected with any who have so devoted themselves. I miss my sister very much, though; we were always great allies: and now I can only hear from her twice a year.’

Hope opened her eyes in amazement.

‘Twice a year! That makes one realize a little what an amount of devotion it must require to be a missionary. It’s nice to think of the reward such men and women will have one day; it will hardly matter whether one has a crown one’s self or not, when one sees them receive theirs.’

‘That’s a very unselfish speech, Miss Milford, and it sounds a very noble sentiment. Perhaps I am mistaken in what you meant; but it seems to me that no crown will mean no service for the Master,’ Mr. Fenwick replied rather gravely.

Hope looked somewhat surprised at being spoken to so seriously by this almost unknown young man, but she appreciated his fearless earnestness; and after a moment's thought, answered frankly:

'Yes, I see where the mistake was; though I didn't mean that because other people had done their work well, it wouldn't matter if one had done anything one's self or not. If that were the case, to see them receive their reward would make one's own shame all the greater. No; but their work will seem so grand then, that I imagine we shall forget all our own miserable little efforts, and only look to see what God thinks of them.'

'Georgie—my sister—said in her last letter, "How *small* our work will seem then!"' Mr. Fenwick said, with a slight smile.

'Yes; but it is just that humility in the people themselves that will make their reward all the greater, won't it? It is the "lowly, lofty brows" that He has promised to crown.'

Colonel Lester had listened silently to the conversation between the two young people: he spoke now.

'It's my idea,' he said, 'that at that day we shan't think or see much of other people's crowns, much less of our own. We shall be entirely absorbed in the Giver of the crowns—not because He is the bestower of rewards, but for what He is in Himself.'

'Colonel Lester has got the highest view of the subject,' said Mr. Fenwick. 'To see the King in His beauty will be the reward, in reality, and we must certainly be entirely taken up with that sight.'

'But all who are His will see Him, and that would be giving no more reward to those who have served much than to those who have served little,' Hope objected.

'You are getting on a difficult subject now, Miss Milford,' Mr. Fenwick said; 'and one which I don't think we can attempt to look into before the time. But I think we shall very likely find then that people who we thought here had done very little, or even nothing, have in reality been some of the truest servants of any.'

'Is one never to judge of people by what one sees, then?' Hope asked; but Mr. Fenwick only smiled—a smile 'which might mean anything,' as she said to herself, half-vexed—and she did not continue the conversation with him, but turned to Colonel Lester, saying, 'I have sometimes thought I should like to be a missionary, you know.'

'I think your vocation is pretty plain at present,' he answered. 'God has evidently fitted you to this work and it to you, I should say.'

'Oh yes; I don't think I would change now. It is so interesting, and gives one opportunities for real missionary work, besides.'

After the previous conversation, when she had rather given the idea that she did nothing particular, Mr. Fenwick wondered what this work of hers was, and ventured to ask.

'I have been learning nursing at a children's hospital and at St. George's,' she answered; 'and when I go

back to London I am to have charge of a little hospital, chiefly for children, belonging to the deaconess establishment of which I am a member.'

'Then do you live in London?' he inquired, amazed at her fresh appearance.

'Yes; I've been training for three years, and am now a certificated nurse.'

'Don't you find it very hard work?'

'Oh yes, it is; but then that is just what I like. You see, I always have a lot of superfluous steam that wants blowing off, and hard work is the best safety-valve for it! Indeed, I don't know what would happen to me if I couldn't lead a busy life.'

'You'd get on all right,' said Colonel Lester.

'No, I'm sure I shouldn't. I should fret and growl and get quite wicked.'

'Well, it would be very wrong of you, then,' was the blunt rejoinder.

Hope coloured, looked down, and said nothing. Colonel Lester was her godfather, and perhaps her greatest friend. He had been the companion and brother-in-arms of her father from early years, and now exercised almost parental care over his friend's orphan child. There had been two little brothers and another sister, all younger than Hope, but they had died in India as children; and soon after the last of these had been taken from her, Mrs. Milford had been obliged to return home, on account of her own health. Hope, then about twelve, had been for some time in the care of relations in England, and now joined her mother;

but it was only for a short time that they were together. Mrs. Milford's health failed rapidly, and before many months had passed, her little girl was motherless.

Shortly after, Colonel Milford came to England with his regiment, and, had his income allowed of it, would have quitted the service, in order to make a settled home for his motherless child ; but this was impossible, and one of his sisters had offered to keep his house, so that he might be able to have his little daughter with him. This arrangement continued till Hope was seventeen, when Colonel Milford died, after a short illness, and his daughter was left without any real home, for her aunt was unable to make one for her. It was then that she joined a small establishment of deaconesses in London, and determined to devote herself to the work of nursing, for which she had already shown a great taste and talent.

Hope was silent for a little time after Colonel Lester's abrupt reproof. He paid no attention to it, but turning round to Mr. Fenwick, entered into a conversation with him regarding the school-inspector, who had lately been in the neighbourhood ; and she presently revived and joined in, as they passed through the park gates, and ascended the rising ground to the house. The horses trotted swiftly through the second gate and the shrubberies, on emerging from which Hope exclaimed, ' Oh, there are the girls ! ' as two white-froaked figures scampered down from a little knoll—one disappearing into the house through an open window, the

other making for the hall-door, where she stood prancing on the steps, as the carriage drove up.

Hope sprang lightly to the ground, with a 'Well, Ada!' and was kissed with great warmth, and Ada, having shaken hands with Mr. Fenwick, dragged her friend into the hall, where they were met by Jessie and her mother.

Very affectionate greetings were exchanged, as they passed through the hall and entered the drawing-room, tastefully furnished, and full of flowers and all kinds of pretty things.

'This does feel cool and nice!' Hope exclaimed, sinking into a luxurious armchair. 'Why didn't you come to meet me at the door, Jessie?'

'Oh,' said Ada, laughing, 'it was because of Mr. Fenwick. She's dreadfully shy of him, because she likes him very much.'

Hope's brown eyes twinkled with great amusement; while Lady Alice said, 'Take care, Ada—not so loud,' as she heard the gentlemen's voices in the hall. They entered; and Lady Alice welcomed Mr. Fenwick with an air of graceful friendliness that contrasted with poor Jessie's hot cheeks and shy constrained manner.

'Hadn't you better go and take your things off, young lady?' said Colonel Lester, coming up to Hope. 'Or can't you leave that comfortable chair?'

'It's quite fascinating,' she replied, smiling; 'and such a new sensation to me. Softly cushioned arm-chairs don't grow at St. George's. But I think I should

like to get my things off, if the girls will take me upstairs.'

'Yes, come along!' Jessie replied, springing up with great alacrity, the sight of which caused both Hope and Ada speedily to develop broad smiles, and to escape out of the room as fast as possible, in order to indulge in laughter.

'You funny girl!' said Hope, as the three ascended the wide staircase. 'What has that unfortunate young parson done to you, that you hate him so?'

'I don't hate him at all—I like him very much, if I haven't to do anything with him. Don't you know that I am always shy of people I like?'

'Shy of Hope, then?' said Ada.

Hope laughed, and Jessie replied:

'That's quite different; I've known her all my life.'

'So you have known Mr. Wise, and yet I'm sure you are afraid enough of him.'

'And is Mr. Fenwick his Curate?' inquired Hope, changing the conversation.

'Yes. He has been there about a year and a half now.'

'Isn't he clever? He looks it.'

'Very clever—preaches beautifully, and is excessively musical; so you'll like him, Hope. Here's your room—the one you always have.'

Tea was brought out into the garden, and afterwards the three girls went off to visit rabbits, etc., and then strolled about the grounds till the dressing-bell rang,



when the Lesters turned back into the garden and Hope went to her room. When she came down, she found Mr. Fenwick alone in the drawing-room, lounging in one of the deep window-seats. He looked up as he heard the light footstep, and then rose quickly.

‘Isn’t this a perfect evening?’ he said.

‘Yes; it is getting cooler now, and the poor little birds are beginning to revive; how they are singing!’

‘Exquisitely. There’s no music like the note of a bird.’

‘You are fond of music?’ said Hope, half-interrogatively.

‘How do you know that?’ Mr. Fenwick asked, colouring slightly.

‘Well, the girls told me; isn’t it true?’

‘Yes, it is,’ he answered, with an earnestness of tone that half-surprised Hope. ‘Do you like music, Miss Milford?’ he asked, after a moment’s pause.

‘Better than anything almost,’ was the quick reply. ‘Only I never can satisfy myself.’

‘That is a good thing,’ he said quietly. ‘If we could satisfy ourselves, we should not advance in anything.’

‘No,’ assented Hope, but in a doubtful tone.

‘It sounds as if you didn’t really accept that sentiment: you think one ought to be able to arrive at satisfaction?’ Mr. Fenwick said, looking rather amused.

‘I don’t know—but it is rather hard to be always falling short of one’s ideal. I was not thinking so much

now of music and that sort of thing,' she added, after a moment's pause, while the young man remained silent, 'but of higher things. Is one's ideal of holiness always to recede before one?'

'I think it depends partly on what your ideal of holiness is,' he replied.

There was evidently no doubt in Hope Milford's mind on this point, at least, for her answer came at once.

'The Lord Jesus,' she said softly and reverently. 'Can we never hope to be like Him here?' she added, after a pause.

'In a measure we can, I think; but there can be no full satisfaction till we are entirely conformed to His image, can there?'

'Then we must wait for satisfaction till we are in heaven,' Hope said quietly, but rather sadly.

'I do not know. I believe to those who truly "follow on to know" Him, He reveals enough of Himself to satisfy the immediate cravings of the soul.'

'And to tantalize one with the sight of perfection which one cannot hope to attain to?' Hope said rather bitterly.

'No, Miss Milford; you should not say that. Did God ever put impossibilities before man?' Mr. Fenwick answered gravely. 'If we only see Christ as an example that we cannot hope to imitate, that isn't seeing Him truly. What has become of His power to enable us to follow Him, in that case?'

'May I ask a question—Do you find that He satisfies

your desire, even now?' Hope asked, looking direct at Mr. Fenwick.

He gave a little quick shake of the head.

'I am very low down in His school,' he answered, smiling; 'the constant falling short is much more my experience at present. But I know some who, although they are always longing for more and more, yet do most distinctly find that He does supply all their need.'

'They are sixth form?' Hope observed, with a smile. 'You think, then, that there is always "daily bread" for us?'

'Certainly.'

'But I don't find it so.'

'Do you always ask for it? Or, if you ask, perhaps when God gives you bread, you think it looks more like a stone, and refuse to take it?' Mr. Fenwick answered.

Hope coloured, and did not reply: and he felt rather uncomfortable at having spoken so plainly, and then wondered if this were false shame; but now Lady Alice and her husband appeared, and dinner having been announced, Colonel Lester gave Hope his arm and led her to the dining-room.

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## CHAPTER II.

‘Therefore His children hold to one another,  
Speak of a hope, and tarry to the end,  
Strong in the bond of sister and of brother,  
Safe in the fellowship of friend and friend.’

FREDERICK MYERS.

THE Lesters were musical, and there was an organ in the hall, at which Mr. Fenwick, coming in from the garden in the course of the next morning, found Hope playing, with Jessie and Ada and a large Persian cat grouped around.

‘The musical talent is exhibiting itself, Miss Milford,’ he observed.

Hope came to an abrupt stop, and looked round in confusion.

‘I didn’t know you were here, or I shouldn’t have played.’

‘I have only come in this minute, but I’m sorry I am such a bugbear. You play very well,’ he added.

‘I can’t bear that you should hear me, though, after that splendid sonata you played last night. I made a horrid mistake just before you spoke.’

‘Yes; but you play with feeling, which is the great thing.’

‘But that doesn’t improve the wrong notes.’

‘I didn’t say it was everything,’ he replied, smiling.

‘But it’s better to play simple things with expression, than to be a brilliant performer, to whom the music is only so much printed paper.’

‘But you are both,’ said Hope.

‘You certainly do your best to make me conceited, Miss Milford,’ said Mr. Fenwick, laughing.

‘But, Mr. Fenwick,’ interposed Ada eagerly, ‘Hope does play beautifully, and sings too.’

He looked at Hope with a mischievous smile.

‘Ah! you are getting caught! But I won’t interrupt you any longer; I dare say I shall have the pleasure of hearing you sing some time.’ And he passed on through the hall and went upstairs.

‘It’s a sight to see him walk,’ said Ada, as soon as he was out of hearing. ‘With those long arms swinging, and his shoulders jerking in that odd, loose way.’

‘Yes,’ replied Hope, laughing. ‘I hope he didn’t see me grinning yesterday, when he was climbing into the carriage. He did look so very gawky, and your father made matters worse by looking round at me in his wicked way.’

‘Oh, I don’t believe he knows how ungainly he is; or, if he does, he doesn’t care. Don’t laugh to-night, Hope, when you see him push back that loose bit of hair in the middle of his speech; he’s sure to do it.’

‘Bad girl! now you have told me, of course I shall

laugh! I won't sit next you. I suppose your father has got up this missionary meeting, and not Mr. Carter?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Carter has had nothing to do with it; though he's quite amiable, and is to open proceedings. I don't suppose his remarks will be very edifying."

"Is he just the same?"

"Exactly," replied Jessie. "Very jolly and good-natured, and fonder than ever of garden-parties and good things to eat."

"“A man gluttonous and a——”" began Ada, but was stopped by her father's voice, stern and sharp, behind her:

"Ada!"

She looked round with somewhat of a guilty smile.

"Remember who those words were spoken of, Ada," said Colonel Lester gravely, and then looked with some surprise at Hope, who was laughing very decidedly.

"I can't help it," she said, in answer to his look of mingled reproof and astonishment. "It is such a good description."

"Suits him exactly," murmured Ada in a regretful tone.

"What do you say "can't help" to me for?" Colonel Lester asked of Hope. "As if you were obliged to do wrong."

"Do you call it wrong?"

"I used not to think it so; but I'm afraid I did great harm to a young man once by making a joke of a text,

and so I don't want these children to get into the way of it. Besides, I think any words—although they can hardly be called sacred, and were certainly not spoken by good men—but any words that were used with reference to our blessed Lord ought not to be treated lightly. Moreover, I don't like that readiness to pick holes in other people, and especially doing it in that flippant sort of way,' he continued, speaking again to his daughter. 'He is our clergyman, and it's not at all becoming in a child like you to be so ready to discuss all his faults.'

'Well, when there's a clergyman like Mr. Wise in the next parish, it's impossible not to see the difference between him and Mr. Carter,' replied Ada, in a tone of self-defence.

'“Judge not, that ye be not judged,”' was all her father's answer, which made Ada colour crimson.

Hope was silent, looking thoughtful; and when she spoke, it was to change the conversation.

The sun was beginning to set, throwing long shadows across the grass, as the party from the Court walked leisurely down to the schools, where the meeting was to take place.

'Won't the room be hot, with a vengeance!' exclaimed Ada, groaning in anticipation of what she was going to encounter. 'Ha!'—as they emerged into the road—'there are Mr. and Mrs. Carter descending the hill!'

'Why, they have got Tommy with them!' said Jessie.

'Oh dear!' Hope exclaimed. 'I do object to that child so much. May he not sit close to me!'

'Poor little fellow!' Lady Alice said; 'he ought to be in bed by this time. How foolish of them to bring him!'

'Just like Mrs. C.,' said Colonel Lester. 'He'll go to sleep before the meeting is half over. What a lot of people are going in! That's encouraging for you, Fenwick. You won't have to speak to empty benches.'

'Perhaps they will all go to sleep,' suggested the young man, smiling.

'That will be your fault, then,' rejoined Colonel Lester, as they entered the building, of which the temperature already gave ample promise of what it might be expected to become. Colonel Lester and Mr. Fenwick proceeded to the little platform at the top of the room, while the female members of the party established themselves on a form two or three rows down.

A minute or two later the Vicar and his wife entered. Mrs. Carter, a rather pretty woman, well and fashionably dressed, seated herself on the bench before the Lesters, with Tommy at her side. The child was exactly in front of Hope, who sighed audibly, whereupon Ada pinched her, and then both laughed. Mr. Carter, a short, rather stout man, with fair hair and beard, and a good-humoured, jovial countenance, bustled up to the platform, shook hands heartily with the two gentlemen, and all three entered into conversation.



Eight o'clock having struck, and the room being full, Mr. Carter, rubbing his hands, proposed, 'Now, my friends, shall we begin this evening's entertainment with singing the hymn, "From Greenland's icy mountains," which I think almost all of you know?'—and promptly led off with a burst of sound that testified to the strength of his lungs. The hymn was heartily sung, and Walter Fenwick's powerful voice, with those of Lady Alice and Hope, maintained something like time and tune, of which Mr. Carter had not much idea.

After a collect had been read by the Vicar, Colonel Lester rose and proceeded to make a few introductory remarks. He spoke slowly, and with slight hesitation at times; but there was a reality and earnestness in tone and manner that carried with it the conviction that the cause for which he spoke was that of a Master Whom he loved with his whole heart. And, indeed, none could come in contact with Colonel Lester and not feel this.

Mr. Fenwick now rose to speak, and Hope was relieved to find that Tommy Carter, who had been making faces at her over the back of the form, now returned to his proper position, and stared at the young clergyman, who, his keen eyes scanning the faces before him, began, in a pleasant, quiet tone, to tell his audience how it was that he came to be in a position to give them any information about missionary work. In a few simple words, but full of affection, he told them of his sister, whose long-cherished desire to labour among the heathen had been fulfilled when she became the partner

of one whose feet were to be 'beautiful' on the wild mountains and in the dark forests of North America as the bringer of good tidings.

Some extracts from her letters followed, which described their work—the long journeys undertaken in fearful cold, the dangers they were sometimes in, the disappointments and successes which attended their labours. The writer appeared to be of a cheerful, warm-hearted disposition, full of energy, and not easily discouraged; while the delight with which the half-yearly home letters were received, and the occasional tender mention of Old England, only caused the listeners the more to admire her self-denial and devotion.

Then Mr. Fenwick laid down the papers, and made an earnest appeal for the support of the noble Society which had sent forth his sister and her husband. He told them of men waiting and longing to go, of countries opening their doors to receive the Gospel; but there was no money, and the opportunity had to go unclaimed. Warming with his subject, he put forth his powers of eloquence. His voice—now clear and stirring as a bugle-call, now soft and tender and full of pathos—went to the hearts of his hearers; and Hope never thought of laughing when he pushed back the loose wave of hair from his forehead. He did not speak for long, but closed his appeal with a few solemn words of reminder, that while he asked for their gifts and their prayers on behalf of those who were in the utter darkness of heathenism, it might even be that among

their own beautiful hills and valleys—yes, even in that very room—there were souls ‘fast bound in misery and iron;’ and that all who knew anything of that service which is ‘perfect freedom’ should begin their missionary work by going to such, and saying, ‘Such as I have, give I thee,’ even the glad tidings that ‘Whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely.’

More than one wished that the meeting could have ended here; but Mr. Carter got up, and after offering the thanks of the meeting to Colonel Lester and Mr. Fenwick, proceeded with a few easy, pleasant remarks, by which he apparently wished to efface any deep impression that might have been made by what they had heard. He was not particularly fluent, but made up for that by rubbing his hands together, and smiling a great deal under his beard. He appeared to think the meeting over now; but a few words from Colonel Lester produced another collect and the Blessing, after which all dispersed.

Mrs. Carter came out with Lady Alice and her young people, the gentlemen remaining to see the result of the collection at the door.

‘Mr. Fenwick is a very fine speaker,’ she said; ‘but I think he put things rather too strongly. One doesn’t want a missionary meeting to be such a solemn affair.’

‘I think the thought of perishing souls is a very solemn one,’ Lady Alice replied quietly. ‘If people did not feel it so, no work would ever be done. Tommy found it rather long, I’m afraid.’

‘Yes, poor little fellow! and there was not much fun in it for him. Good-night!’

The next morning, Mr. Fenwick left Badgery Court, Colonel Lester accompanying him to the gate.

‘Going on duty again, now?’ observed the latter, smiling, as they separated.

‘I hope I’ve never been off,’ replied the young clergyman earnestly.

‘Ah! you have learnt that that is the happiest life from your Vicar. You thought it rather a hard principle, at one time?’

‘I did; but I’ve learnt better now, I hope—thanks to him, and you, sir. Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye, Fenwick. Well, I believe that one day we shall see some fruit of last night’s meeting. Come over here whenever you like; we are always glad to see you, you know.’

Colonel Lester went back to the house, and Mr. Fenwick proceeded along the dusty road. In spite of the heat, he walked fast—it was not his nature to be slow about anything—and his long legs carried him quickly over the ground. It was a very quiet country road, and he only met one or two people; so he amused himself, as was his custom on his walks, with singing snatches of hymns and chants, or scraps from oratorios, varied by occasionally whistling some favourite air.

After three miles of this sort of thing he arrived at Avenham—which was a picturesque place, hardly to be called a town, and yet something more than a village

—when he brought his music to an end, and restored his hat to its proper form, the brim having been turned down to form a shade from the sun. The children were all at school, and most of the people out at work, so that he did not meet many acquaintances as he passed up the wide village street, at the top of which the square church tower, built of warm red sandstone, stood out against the background of a richly-wooded hill. At the lych-gate he paused, then opened it, and passed into the churchyard. A newly-made grave attracted his notice, and he went to look at it; but there was no headstone yet put up which could tell him whose it was.

Walter Fenwick gazed thoughtfully down at the fresh earth for a few minutes, and then went on and entered the church porch. The door was always unfastened, he knew, and pushing aside the curtain that hung before it, he passed in.

It was a beautiful church—singular by the almost total absence of any colour about it. The walls were of plain stone; the pulpit, lectern, seats, and roof of carved oak; and a screen of the same, of very ancient date and wonderfully rich in workmanship, separated the chancel from the nave. Even the stained glass, with which nearly all the windows were filled, was remarkably subdued in colour; the effect of the whole building was singularly chaste, and calculated to impress with a sense of sober beauty, without attracting the attention to any particular feature.

Slowly and reverently Walter Fenwick came up the

aisle and entered the chancel, and there knelt down and humbly bent his head to seek for grace, in God's own house, on his return to the solemn work of his office. He had never done such a thing before; but as he came up the village he had felt drawn to enter the church, and there, in its solemn dimness and silence, before meeting his Vicar or his parishioners, to be for a while alone with his God.

On quitting the church, he turned along the road, which branched off at right angles with the village street, and which, as it led out of the village, became a country lane, overarched by trees. But before arriving at this point Mr. Fenwick stopped at one of the houses, an old-fashioned-looking dwelling, with bright flowers in the projecting window. He entered the low door, which stood open, and called:

'Mrs. Burrows!'

A stout, middle-aged woman immediately appeared, with a countenance beaming like the rising sun, which appellation, indeed, Mr. Fenwick sometimes bestowed on her when she was not in hearing.

'Ha! Mrs. Burrows, how are you? Here I am again, you see.'

'Very well, thank you, sir. Glad to see you back. And how are you, sir?' responded Mrs. Burrows, courtesying first, and then responding to the young man's hearty shake of the hand.

'All right, thank you. I've had a jolly time, but I'm very glad to be back, all the same. How's Jock?'

'Quite well, sir. I told him you were coming back

to-day, and he quite understood. So sensible-like them dorgs are ! I'll call him in, sir.'

A call from the back-door was followed in another moment by the boisterous entrance of a fine black-and-tan collie-dog, who nearly knocked Mrs. Burrows over, as he sprang upon Walter in a state of rapture.

The greeting between master and dog was one of evident real affection : when it was over, Mr. Fenwick said :

' Well, Mrs. Burrows, I'm going up to the Vicarage, but I'll come back for dinner. There's a smell of something very good. Stay ! are there any letters for me ?'

' Two, sir, in your room.'

He entered the little room with the flowers in the window, and took up the letters which lay on his writing-table ; having looked at them, he stuck his hat anyhow on his head, and saying, ' Come along, Jockie !' left the house.

He retraced his steps to the churchyard gate, and went straight on instead of turning into the main street, arriving soon at a green gate. Passing through, he and Jock proceeded up the shady drive, and emerged before the Vicarage : a pretty, gable-ended house of a good size. He was just going to ring the bell, when a shout of ' Hallo !' from the other side of the lawn attracted his attention. He turned quickly, and raced across in the direction of a large lime-tree, springing over the flower-beds in a marvellously ungainly fashion, and getting entangled in Jock's

legs, who frisked about him uttering short, sharp barks.

On a low, invalid chair, in the shade of the tree, lay a youth of about twenty, his pale, thin countenance bearing evident marks of suffering, but with a wonderful expression of sweetness and calm. A slight flush was on his face as Walter Fenwick entered his green bower and shook his hand warmly.

‘So here you are again, old chap! I thought you would be turning up.’

‘Of course. How are you, Arthur?’

‘Much the same, thank you,’ was the answer, with a quiet smile.

Walter cast at him a curious glance, half of pity, but more of reverence; then threw his hat on the ground, pushed back his hair and ran his fingers through it, and finally stretched himself on the grass beside Arthur.

‘You’ve not grown more civilized in appearance. You look as mad as a hatter,’ observed the latter, laughing, and pulling his friend’s loose hair.

‘Well, it hasn’t been my object of late to study civilization.’

‘When is it your object?’ returned Arthur, still laughing.

‘What’s the good of my caring about appearances? I haven’t even to maintain my dignity as a Vicar. Who cares how a Curate looks?’

‘The young ladies,’ replied Arthur, looking very mischievous.



'You rascal!' exclaimed Walter, shaking his fist at Arthur in pretended wrath. 'Now, then, Jock, leave that wasp alone, sir! How are you all here?'

'Flourishing. Ha! here's Ruth.'

A tall girl, bearing a strong resemblance to her brother, but healthy and active-looking, came round the tree, and Mr. Fenwick sprang to his feet.

'I thought I saw you lying here as I came across,' she said, smiling. 'Have you had a nice holiday? You look as if you had enjoyed it,' she added, glancing at the tall, vigorous form and bright, sunburnt face.

'So I have. It was capital. I had a first-rate tramp through Derbyshire with Phillips and Vernón, and since then I've been at home, riding and walking with Ursula and the boys, and having lots of fun—though I was dragged into more parties than I cared about.'

'I say!' struck in Arthur, 'how long are you going to stay gossiping here before you report yourself to your Vicar?'

'Get up and report yourself now,' said a cheerful voice, and a tall clergyman of about fifty appeared. Walter Fenwick turned quickly round, and it was pleasant to see the greeting between Vicar and Curate—frank and hearty, with genial friendliness on the one side, and unconstrained ease combined with perfect respect on the other.

'So you have turned up at last,' said Mr. Wise. 'Well, there's plenty for you to do at once.'

'Glad to hear it,' responded Walter.

Mr. Wise smiled, well pleased at the answer, and continued :

‘How are your people? Well, I hope.’

‘Yes, thank you; at least, my mother’s much as usual—never very well, you know. Ursula and the boys have grown a great deal, and are very flourishing. Lionel is an uncommonly fine little fellow, and does old Eton great credit.’

‘In spite of all one hears against Eton, its atmosphere seems to suit the Fenwicks,’ observed Arthur aside to his sister, smiling and glancing in the direction of Walter Fenwick, while his father went on :

‘And you have come to-day from Badgery? How did your meeting go off?’

‘Very well; and we had a capital collection afterwards. The people seemed much interested.’

‘Lester was very anxious it should be a success. It’s a blessing, indeed, that the place has such a squire; otherwise, I don’t know what would become of it. Carter was there, I suppose?’

‘Yes. I fancy he thought I spoke rather too strongly; but I couldn’t help that.’

‘“His Word was in me as a burning fire,”’ quoted Arthur, with a half-smile.

‘I think it was a little of that,’ replied the young clergyman gravely. ‘I felt they were immortal souls before me, and I was obliged to speak.’

‘How are the Lesters?’ Mr. Wise asked.

‘Very well, apparently. They have a young lady staying with them who seems to know you—Miss Milford.’

‘Oh, is Hope come already?’ exclaimed Ruth and Arthur.

‘We travelled together from Hilborough—of course, without knowing each other.’

‘I shall like to see her again,’ said Mr. Wise. ‘She hasn’t been in these parts for two years now. She used to be a very nice girl.’

‘Didn’t Jessie Lester send any message to me?’ asked Ruth.

‘No, I think not. I only just saw her to wish her good-bye,’ replied Mr. Fenwick, who did not know that Jessie had spent at least five minutes that morning wondering if she could venture to ask him to give a message to Ruth Wise, who was her great friend, and had finally decided that she could not attempt such an alarming step. Ada had offered to give it to Mr. Fenwick, but Jessie did not feel sure that her mischievous sister would not make some additions and explanations of her own in delivering it, and declined the offer.

‘You’ll stay for luncheon?’ said Mr. Wise to his Curate.

‘Thank you—no. I promised Mrs. Burrows I would have dinner there. She’s preparing something very good for me, I believe.’

‘And Mrs. Burrows’ savoury viands have greater attractions for you than a joint of cold mutton with the society of your friends.’

‘Now, as it happens, you are not going to have cold mutton, but cold pie. Don’t talk about things of which

you're ignorant, Philip,' said a voice behind ; and Mrs. Wise, an active, pleasant-looking person, appeared, and greeted Mr. Fenwick warmly.

'Come now, Fenwick ! cold pie ! Surely that's an inducement to you to stay here. Mrs. Burrows won't give you anything as good as that,' said Mr. Wise, laughing.

'Oh, I'm not so sure about that,' replied Mr. Fenwick. 'No, I mustn't stay, thank you. I should bring a dreadful cloud over the face of the Rising Sun, if I disappointed her the day of my return.'

'Well, then, if you are not to be persuaded, come into the study with me, will you ?'

The Vicar and Curate went off together, to talk over parish matters first, and of that Master and that service to which they were both devoted ; and, finally, to kneel together, while the elder clergyman told the wants of his young fellow-helper, his parish, and himself, to the God Who, he knew, was both able and willing to supply all their need. Perhaps there was nothing which so deepened the real, true friendship between these two men as these times of prayer together.

Mrs. Wise soon left her children, and Ruth seated herself at the foot of her brother's couch.

'I'm uncommonly glad Fenwick has come back,' Arthur observed. 'Nice fellow, he is !'

'Very. And it's always pleasanter for you when he is here.'

'I wish I could have heard his address last night ; I dare say it was splendid,' said her brother. 'He's the right sort of fellow to be a clergyman.'

‘Who wouldn’t learn to be, living with father?’

‘Yes, indeed; but Fenwick always had his heart in his work. Oh, he must be happy!’

Ruth did not answer; she knew what her brother was thinking of, and presently he broke out:

‘If only there were any chance of my ever being able to take Holy Orders, it would be such a thing to look forward to!’

‘I wish there was, Arthur dear,’ replied his sister sadly, laying her hand on his.

‘It is just at times like these, when I see Fenwick come back, full of strength and earnestness, and plunge so eagerly into his work again, that I almost feel that it is hard; not quite—thank God! I don’t say that now; but I wish—oh, Ruth! I do *wish*!’

The girl was silent. She knew that no human being could realize the bitter disappointment and grief it was to her brother, to feel himself cut off, by a sudden and terrible accident, from ever realizing the desire of his heart, and she did not often try to comfort him by words, when these rare bursts of feeling came. It was very seldom now that he was outwardly anything but patient and cheerful.

‘It’s all right,’ he said presently. ‘“What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” I can trust Him.’

And as the dinner-bell rang, he raised himself on his crutches, and with the help of them and Ruth’s arm moved slowly and painfully towards the house.

## CHAPTER III.

'Only one heart to give,  
Only one voice to use,  
Only one little life to live,  
And only one to lose.'

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL.

HOPE MILFORD and the Lester girls were walking through the village, towards the close of an afternoon, a few days later. The three girls were very merry together; for Jessie lost her shyness when alone with her sister and their friend, and frolicked about the road and up the steep banks as eagerly as they did.

Just as they began to descend a hill, Ada exclaimed:

'There's Mr. Wise coming up the road!'

'So he is! Oh, I'm glad of that!' Hope said.

'I'll take a run down the hill and meet him,' Ada said, and started off, while Hope and Jessie followed more leisurely, the latter getting very hot as he approached.

'Well, girls!' said Mr. Wise, as they met. 'I hadn't seen you were coming, till this avalanche'—pulling Ada's long, fair hair—'descended upon me. How are you, Hope?'

‘Very well, thank you. It is so nice to see you again.’

‘You look very well, and not at all changed. I don’t think you have grown any older in appearance.’

‘Haven’t I? I feel a good deal older, in some ways; I know about so many things of different kinds now, that I used to be quite ignorant of.’

‘Yes, young people generally don’t know much about suffering, whereas I dare say you have already seen more than I have in the course of my life.’

‘I had no idea how much people could suffer, till I went to the hospital,’ Hope remarked. ‘It is very sad to see; but I think it does one good, in many ways.’

‘Are you going to see father?’ Ada asked of Mr. Wise.

‘Yes; so I mustn’t stay gossiping with you children. Mind you come over and see us some day, Hope.’

‘Of course I shall. I want to see Ruth and Arthur very much,’ she answered, and then looked suddenly grave; for when she had last seen Arthur Wise, he had been a strong, active youth, full of health and spirits, and just entered on his University life.

Mr. Wise saw the change in her face, and understood it.

‘Yes,’ he said sadly, ‘you will find our poor Arthur very different from what you remember him. You were thinking of that, were you not?’

Hope nodded.

‘You will find him a good deal changed in another

way, too. The way in which he bears his trial is to me a marvellous proof of what God is able to do.'

'He was always so good,' Hope said softly.

'Yes, thank God! he hadn't to begin to learn His love when this blow came. But he has ripened wonderfully since, and I know my boy's life preaches a constant sermon to me. But I must be going on; so good-bye.'

Mr. Wise proceeded towards Badgery, and the three girls went on their way.

'Poor Arthur! I almost dread seeing him,' Hope said.

'Oh, it is so dreadfully sad!' Jessie answered. 'You know he is never really out of pain, I believe; and you see it in his face, although he is so bright. And then to think that he can never be a clergyman, when he longed so to be one!'

'And what a disappointment that must be to his father! He used to look forward so much to having his son engaged in the same work as himself.'

'I think it is a great thing for Arthur that Mr. Fenwick is there,' Jessie observed. 'Arthur says he is quite like a brother to him—always ready to come and sit with him; and you heard the way Mr. Fenwick himself spoke of Arthur.'

'Yes, he seemed to think him almost perfect. How fortunate Mr. Wise is to have such a nice Curate!'

'Yes, he is quite one of themselves, and so devoted to his Vicar and the work there; but I believe Mr. Wise thinks he ought to be in a town.'



‘Oh, but he told me he had had a London curacy before this one, and that he could not bear towns: and I’m sure he doesn’t look suited to one,’ Hope said, laughing.

‘It shows his good sense,’ Ada remarked. And Hope agreed that the country was very preferable to London, though she disclaimed any idea of quitting her work there.

‘I am quite well there, and we are not meant always to seek the most pleasant places,’ she said.

She was very anxious to accomplish her visit to the Wises; and one day, when they were driving through Avenham, she was dropped at the Vicarage, while Lady Alice and Jessie went on to pay a visit. She was shown into the drawing-room, and there found Mrs. Wise, who was in her garden-hat, just preparing to take her work out and sit with Arthur, and proposed that Hope should accompany her.

‘Ruth is gone out with her father,’ she said; ‘so that Arthur is without his devoted slave, for a time.’

‘I hope I shall see them.’

‘Oh yes! I expect them in soon.—Here’s a pleasant surprise for you, Arthur dear,’ she added, as they found him on his low couch, which was placed in the shade at the end of a terrace-walk, from whence an extremely pretty view was obtained.

‘Hope! So here you are! how are you?’

Hope’s hand responded to his warm shake, while she wished she could prevent the pitying expression which she felt was on her face, and which she found it im-

possible to conceal at the sight of that prostrate, helpless form and youthful face, pale and worn with constant suffering. She had a tender heart, which had been softened, rather than hardened, by her three years' experience of scenes of suffering in the hospital, and a tear now rose involuntarily to her eye. She hastened to turn her thoughts to another subject.

'What are you doing here?' she asked, looking at a half-finished water-colour sketch which lay on the sliding-table drawn across Arthur's couch. 'I didn't know you could draw.'

'I've always been fond of it,' he answered; 'but when I was at school and college, and always boating and playing cricket, and that sort of thing, I hadn't much time for such an elegant accomplishment. Now, it's a great pleasure to me—though very often even this is too much exertion.'

The smile with which his first words had been spoken died away, and a sigh, as from very weariness, closed the sentence.

'You do it beautifully,' Hope said. 'It is the view from here, I see.'

'Yes. It makes a very pretty sketch, and I came out here to-day to finish it. I say, did you come over alone?'

'No, I was dropped from the carriage at the corner. Lady Alice and Jessie are gone to call on the Camerons, and will pick me up on their way back.'

'So we must have you done up in brown paper and string ready for them,' Arthur said, laughing. 'Ah,

here is Ruth,' as steps were heard on the gravel path, and his sister ran up to them and kissed Hope warmly, exclaiming :

'Oh, Hope, I'm so glad you have come! What an age it is since we've seen you! but you look much the same. Here's father,' as Mr. Wise joined the group.

'How long are you going to stay at Badgery?' Mrs. Wise inquired, as she made the tea, which had been brought out into the garden.

'I have only a week more,' Hope answered. 'I have been here ten days, and I must go for a bit to Aunt Julia, before I go back to London.'

'And then you settle to the collar again?' Mr. Wise said, smiling. 'What is your work to be now? Have you quite finished your training?'

'Yes—at last. Well—I am going to devote myself to the nursing portion of our work. You know, some of us take up the teaching line, others the visiting, and so on.'

'And do you go about alone in all those dreadful slums?' Ruth asked.

'I haven't done much in that way yet, for I have been hardly at all at the Deaconess House; but now I shall begin it.'

'You are rather young,' Mr. Wise remarked.

'I couldn't do it, I suppose, if I were an ordinary young lady,' Hope answered.

'But being a most extraordinary one, of course it doesn't matter what you do,' put in Arthur mischievously.

‘Be quiet,’ Hope said, while they all laughed at his remark. ‘What I mean is, that if I were living at home, in a private way, it wouldn’t be considered proper to go about into these bad places; but, you see, I have given myself up to this kind of work. And we younger ones generally go about in pairs; and then, our dress is a great protection.’

‘But I thought you had no dress, as you are not Sisters,’ Ruth said.

‘We used to have none; but it has been decided lately, that, as several of us are young, and yet must go about more or less alone, it would be better to have a distinctive garb. And, you know, the Sisters’ dress gains them entrance into places where no one else could go.’

‘What is your dress, then?’

‘Plain black dresses and cloaks, and little close bonnets, with a gauze veil behind, and white cap inside. In the house we wear white caps and aprons. It’s very neat, and I like it.’

‘I should think it was becoming, and I expect it is the wisest plan to have a regular dress,’ Mrs. Wise said.

‘I should like to see you in it,’ said Ruth. ‘You must feel quite queer when you put on ordinary garments.’

‘We are not bound to it in the least, you know; except to wear it for our visiting and work generally,’ Hope answered. ‘But if we go to see anyone in London, we dress just as I do now.’

‘And shall you find enough nursing to keep you occupied in that way?’ asked Mr. Wise.

‘I expect so. There is always a good deal of sickness about in those low parts,’ was Hope’s reply; ‘and, besides, we have just been building a few rooms on to the house, which are to be a sort of children’s hospital. Sometimes the only chance of curing the poor little things is to take them away from their homes; and I am to be in charge of this as regards the nursing, though, of course, Mrs. Wilmot is the head of everything. We might, perhaps, admit older cases sometimes, if they were very urgent; but that we shall see.’

‘I should say you have a pretty wide field of work before you,’ the clergyman said.

‘Yes, indeed! As the time comes so near for me to begin on it, I feel it very—*tremendous* is the word, I think.’

‘So it is. You will have immense opportunities of getting hold of people. But you like the work, Hope?’

‘Oh, indeed I do!’ she answered quickly. ‘One gets so fond of the people. There was a young soldier brought in to St. George’s once who had been run over, and he was such a dear fellow.’

‘Was he much hurt? Did he get better?’ asked Ruth.

‘No; he died,’ Hope answered gravely; and then she was silent for a minute or two, evidently recalling some solemn scene.

And now a servant came from the house, saying:

‘Her ladyship is waiting in the carriage for you, miss.’

‘I must not keep them,’ Hope said; ‘they have some people to dinner to-night,’ and she rose to go.

‘I wish I could come and see you off,’ said Arthur, with a sad smile, as his parents and sister prepared to escort Hope to the carriage.

‘So do I, indeed!’ responded she. ‘Oh, Arthur, I do feel so much for you, though I didn’t like to show it.’

‘Thank you,’ he replied. ‘I don’t shrink from pity, though a great palaver is not pleasant. But you wouldn’t go in for that. Good-bye! And, Hope,’ he added earnestly, as she lingered a little behind the others, ‘do take care not to lose your opportunities. I know you must have a great many; and since I can’t work actively myself, I do long that all who can should be whole-hearted in their work. There is *so much* to be done. You don’t mind my speaking like this to you?’

Hope did not answer, but she squeezed Arthur’s hand, with tears in her soft eyes; then saying huskily, ‘Pray for me, will you, Arthur?’ she caught up her parasol and ran after the others.

Arthur Wise lay still after Hope had gone, leaning his head on his hand. He heard the sound of the carriage-wheels going down the drive, and through the trees he caught a glimpse of the bright, gentle face turned to give a parting smile to the friends standing in the porch. A sort of shade passed over his face, accompanied by a slight quiver of the lip. When he

had seen Hope, two years before, both had been in the flush of hope and energy that belongs to youth stepping out into the wide, unknown future. To Arthur, Hope would sometimes disclose her deep feelings, which she rarely shared with any human being but Colonel Lester; and then it was that in the boy's heart there awoke a feeling of real, fervent love towards the girl who had been his playfellow from childhood. But Hope went back to her work in London; and, in a few months, Arthur lay on the couch to which he was to be condemned for life—a helpless cripple; all dreams of usefulness, as well as those of a tenderer nature, blasted for ever.

And now he had seen her again—and the old love came back in all its force, although he knew it was vain. He opened his Bible, which lay on the table beside him, and took out of it a little photograph of a French picture. It depicted that scene—the most solemn of all but *one* to illustrate—the ‘Man of Sorrows’ in His agony in the Garden. He was kneeling, with hands clasped, and face raised towards Heaven. In one corner appeared the Cup, surmounted by the Cross; but the Face did not bear the look of intense anguish. No, it was rather that which we may believe to have come at the close of the conflict—the embodied expression of the simply beautiful words, written on the ray of light, which the artist had represented as coming down from Heaven—‘Oui, Mon Père, oui.’

Hope had sent the photograph to Ruth not long

after Arthur's accident; telling her to give it to him, if she thought he would like it, or else to keep it herself. But it was not because it was Hope's gift that Arthur looked at it. As day after day passed on of weary inactivity and suffering—not any the less trying because he was now accustomed to it, and unrelieved by even a remote prospect of recovery; and things happened, as they constantly did, and had just now, to remind him of his changed condition—the silent cry for help brought the grace which enabled him to say, with lips and life, 'Yes, my Father, yes.'

Well would it be for us if this were the motto of every life.

About a fortnight later, Hope Milford was in the train, speeding on her way back to London. Since leaving Badgery Hall, she had been spending a week at Clifton with the aunt who had lived with them before Colonel Milford's death; now, her holiday was over.

Her face wore a grave expression as she sat in her corner of the carriage; for many and mostly serious thoughts were passing through her mind. In the last three years—since she was deprived of the shelter of a home, and had to go forth alone into the world—her feelings had much deepened. She was of quick sensibilities and imagination, and of a loving disposition; and all these qualities had been strengthened by her hospital work.

But of late Hope had experienced a growing sense of



what exists deep down in the hearts of all, although some have it more than others—a feeling not so much of *dissatisfaction* as of *unsatisfaction*. She was happy by nature, and she found constant pleasure in her work, in music, and in the many beautiful things in God's beautiful world. More thoroughly than many, perhaps, she could say with the poetess—

'My God, I thank Thee, Who hast made  
The earth *so bright*.'

But in her own heart there was a want. Brought face to face, as she constantly was, with the great realities of life and death, she had become solemnly impressed with the conviction that there was such a thing as having the heart 'surely fixed;' and she needed but her own experience to tell her that she had never yet attained to this condition. It was as she had said to Mr. Fenwick—the ideal of holiness, towards which her hands were longingly stretched, seemed always to recede before her. She had seen what is the Christian's true and, indeed, only standard, and she felt that she could never be satisfied with anything less; but something was ever dragging her back. 'Peace *with* God' she knew and possessed, but that was quite a different thing from 'the peace *of* God' which should 'keep' her heart and mind. Colonel Lester and Lady Alice had this, she felt sure; so had Arthur. True, it did not make them sit quietly down, as if they had got all they wanted and all that there was for them; but they were 'kept,' and they knew it.

'Yes, that's it,' said Hope to herself; 'and that's just what I don't know. I'm nothing but ups and downs, and yet that isn't what we're meant to be. Why don't I have this rest? Ah! there must be the taking the yoke first, I suppose. I wonder if I'm willing to do that? I'm afraid not. It's impossible to know what it might involve. And yet the yoke is God's Will. Well, that must be the best thing for me, and I think I do want to do it. I want to be free to serve Him; not falling under the power of sin again and again, and crying and calling out for deliverance. That's not what we are intended to do, I'm sure; we're intended to "*stand fast* in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." I want my life to speak my name to others, and it will never give them Hope if they see constant failures and half-heartedness. And God has such blessings to give me! and, of course, it grieves Him if I won't take them. And then there are all those opportunities of which Arthur spoke. "*So much to do!*" Yes, indeed; and perhaps the time is very short. It strikes me that what I want is to put myself in God's hands, for Him to do just what He likes with me—like Abraham, who "went out not knowing whither he went." But, hallo! here we are at Paddington!'

Hailing a porter, Hope emerged on to the platform of the great station, and in a short time was rattling off in a cab. A long drive brought her to the Deaconess House, which stood in a busy thoroughfare not very far from the river.

'Is Mrs. Wilmot in?' inquired Hope of the neat little maid who opened the door.

'Yes, miss; she's just come in. I think she's in her room.'

Hope ran swiftly up the staircase to the first landing, rendered gay by a stand full of ferns and flowers in the window. She knocked at a door, and a voice from within answered:

'Come in.'

A sweet-looking lady, in the plain black bonnet and cloak of the deaconesses, looked up from her writing-table as the bright young face appeared at the door.

'So it is you, dear!' she exclaimed, kissing the newcomer affectionately. 'I thought you would be turning up about this time, and came in to be here to welcome you.'

'How good of you, Mrs. Wilmot! I suppose the house is deserted by all the others?'

'I think so; though I'm not quite sure if Bessie Graham isn't at home, preparing for her class this evening. How well you look, dear child!'

'So I am. As strong as a horse, and wanting a lot of work.'

'I am glad to hear that. We have plenty for you to do. For one thing, there's a man ill with gastric fever, and he wants proper nursing. Now go and get your things off, my dear, and come back here. I am going to indulge you and myself with afternoon tea to-day.'

'That's a treat!' Hope exclaimed, scampering off up

two more flights of stairs to the simply furnished room which she occupied with another deaconess.

The rattle of vehicles and the various street-cries outside sounded very different from the singing of birds and all the country sounds which she had enjoyed at Badgery; but Hope did not feel melancholy. She looked out upon the crowds in the street below, and thought how each individual was the possessor of a never-dying soul, over which her Saviour was yearning with inexpressible love. She knew that she was called to labour among those souls, and she felt the greatness of the work, and her own utter insufficiency for it. But she grasped the truth of a power within her that enabled her not to shrink back, and, turning from the window, she said to herself, "I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God."

CHAPTER IV.

‘Thou’rt like unto a flower ;  
As fair, as pure, as bright.  
I gaze on thee, and sadness  
Steals o’er my heart’s delight.  
I long on those golden tresses  
My folded hands to lay,  
Praying that Heaven may preserve thee  
So fair, so pure, alway.’

*Translated from Heine.*

WALTER FENWICK sat at his writing-table in the little room with the low, projecting window before described. A soup-plate full of primroses stood on the table, and pots of hyacinths and tulips were arranged on the broad window-sill. He was sitting with his elbows on the table and his head leaning on his hands, and the two upright lines between his eyebrows very strongly marked, as he perused an open letter before him. Presently he pushed back his hair, rose, and catching up his hat, left the house. Jock was seated at the door, enjoying the spring sunshine, and snapping at the flies that occasionally buzzed around him ; but when his master appeared, he jumped up and accompanied him.

Walter's long strides soon brought him to the Vicarage, where the door stood wide open. He crossed the hall and knocked at the study-door. 'Come in,' said his Vicar's voice; and on entering, he found Colonel Lester seated there.

'Oh, it's you!' said Mr. Wise. 'Do you want to see me?'

'Yes, I did; but I won't disturb you.'

'Well, if you can wait a few minutes, I shall be glad. You had better go and see Arthur; I believe he's in the den.'

Walter departed, and went to the sitting-room which belonged specially to Ruth and Arthur. Here he found these two, and also Jessie Lester, who had driven over with her father.

'Mr. Wise sent me here, while Colonel Lester is with him. I hope I'm not disturbing you,' Walter said.

'Not a bit! Come and sit down. Yes, dear Jockie'—as a pair of tan paws appeared on the low window-sill, with two beseeching brown eyes above—'come in, of course.'

Jock did not wait for Ruth to repeat her invitation, but at once calmly walked in through the window, in spite of his master's remonstrances. Walter Fenwick stayed and chatted in the pleasant room, and was engaged in an amusing argument with Arthur, which convulsed the two girls with laughter, when Colonel Lester came in, saying:

'Now, then, Fenwick, your vicar is free, and you had

better go to him. I shall come and keep these young people in order, as I hear Mrs. Wise is out.'

'Well, Fenwick, sorry to have kept you waiting. What is it?' Mr. Wise asked, as his curate entered.

'Oh, I wanted to know if you could let me go to London to-morrow, for a couple of days? My mother wants me to go there about some business for her, which is rather important.'

'Go, by all means. Nothing serious, I hope?'

'Not at all; but she's in rather a fuss about it. It's a nuisance having to go; and I'm afraid I shall be away for the Wednesday and Friday services.'

'Never mind that—I can quite manage without you. How long did you say you would be gone?'

'I shall try to get it over in one day, but I may have to stay another.'

'Very well. If you are back on Saturday, that's all I want.'

'Thank you, sir;' and Walter returned to the sitting-room, where he said, 'I'm going up to London to-morrow for a couple of nights. Is there anything I can do for anyone?'

'Heyday! What a sudden freak!' exclaimed Arthur. 'What are you going up for, young man? a new play?'

'Probably,' was the answer, with a merry smile. 'No; I'm going to do some business for my mother. I shall be off by the first train to-morrow; so have your commissions—if there are any—ready to-night, will you, please? I'll come up again then. Is there any-

thing. I can do for you, sir?' he added, turning to Colonel Lester.

'Nothing that I know of, thank you.'

Jessie coloured, and glanced timidly at Mr. Fenwick, as if she wished to say something, but couldn't summon courage. However, neither her mother nor Ada was there to act as mediator, so at last she said:

'Wouldn't it be nice, father, to send some flowers to Hope, if Mr. Fenwick would take them up?'

'Yes. I've no doubt you would take charge of a box, Fenwick?'

'With great pleasure. For Miss Milford? I must have her address, please.'

'She's located down in Shoreditch; but you could forward the box to her by Parcels Delivery Company, you know, as it would be rather out of your way, I imagine.'

'Oh, I think I shall be able to deliver them safe myself. The Parcels Delivery people are so very dilatory, that flowers stand rather a bad chance in their hands. How shall I get them from you, though?'

'Ah, let me see. We'll send the box down to our station to-morrow morning, if you'll look out for it when you pass.'

'All right. And now, I must go.'

Mr. Wise saw the tall, loose-limbed figure, with hat all on one side, pass his study-window, and called after him:

'I say, Fenwick! come to supper to-night.'

'Thank you, I will.'



‘And try and wear your hat straight in London!’ added his Vicar, laughing, as the young man went down the drive whistling.

It was early in the afternoon of the following day that Mr. Fenwick found himself standing before the Deaconess House in Shoreditch. The April sun was powerful, and shone quite fiercely down on the street, and he longed to be able to bring some of the fresh breezes from the Quantocks, and let them loose among the narrow lanes and courts he had passed.

Standing with his back to the door, waiting for the bell to be answered, he became engrossed in the doings of two small boys, who were sparring over some marbles on the pavement close by, and whose language was enough to strike horror and sadness to the heart of a less earnest and God-fearing man than Walter Fenwick. Therefore, when the door was opened, he remained unconscious of it for a minute—a good deal to the surprise of the servant; then turned, with a start, and raised his hand to his brow, for the accustomed thrust back of his hair, by which he always collected his thoughts.

He handed in his burden, with the message he had been charged to deliver with it, and was just going to leave, when a figure in black dress and white apron and cap tripped lightly across the hall. The dress was different, but, as the face turned towards the door, he saw it was Hope Milford. The maid, too, had seen her, and said :

‘Here is Miss Milford, sir;’ but meanwhile Hope

had recognised Mr. Fenwick, and with a smile and exclamation of surprise, came quickly to the door.

‘Mr. Fenwick! I am surprised to see you here!’

‘I was just delivering a box for you—flowers from Badgery, I believe,’ said the young clergyman, heartily shaking the hand she gave, and stepping just inside the door.

‘Oh, how delightful! That is good of them! Are you staying in London?’

‘Only for a couple of nights or so, on some business; but I saw Colonel and Miss Lester yesterday, and they asked me to bring these flowers to you.’

‘Which asked him, I wonder?’ thought Hope. ‘Surely not Jessie!’ Then, as she removed the cover of the box, and took out, first the delicate hot-house flowers and ferns, and then the masses of primroses, with their fresh, crinkled leaves; cowslips, nodding on their pale green stalks; and wild hyacinths, with great bunches of lilac and laburnum—she put her hands together and gave a little spring of ecstasy, her whole face radiant with delight. And yet, when she turned her eyes towards Mr. Fenwick, a moment after, he saw tears in them.

She appeared conscious of it herself, and, putting up her hand, brushed them away.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, with a great sigh that yet was not one of sadness, ‘I know so many houses where these flowers will seem just like good angels. Such sad homes, many of them—from one cause and another! but these are wonderful little messengers.

They sometimes soften when nothing else will. Dear things !' and Hope bent down and buried her nose in the primroses.

'And your hospital, Miss Milford?—I suppose you will take some there?'

'I should think so! My poor, dear children, how charmed they will be! Are they all well at Badgery?'

'Quite, I think; though I haven't seen much of them lately. Our country is looking quite beautiful now.'

'Ah! I can just imagine it. I think you have brought a whiff of the air with you, Mr. Fenwick,' Hope said, laughing. 'How is Arthur?'

'Much as usual, I fancy; except that he seems to grow more heavenly—for I can't use any other word—almost every week.'

'I think it must be a great privilege to see as much of him as you do; I think I should feel it so,' Hope observed rather shyly.

'I am sure it is. One has the sort of feeling towards him which I suppose men had towards the old saints one reads about, who were looked upon as superior beings often, just because their lives were so much purer and more spiritual than what were generally seen.'

'Yes, I am afraid it is the same still. There seem to be very few Arthur Wises in the world.'

'We will hope there are more than we think. One of Arthur's charms is, that his saintliness doesn't consist in asceticism. It's perfectly wonderful the interest

he takes in everything going on. He is giving Miss Lester drawing-lessons now, I believe.'

'Really! that is energetic of him. But it is very nice for both; and, judging by his own sketches, he will be a good master.'

'Mrs. Wise—indeed, all of them—told me to say that they hoped you would give *them* a visit this summer. Do you think you are likely to?' Mr. Fenwick asked.

'Oh, I can't say at all yet. I have made no summer plans. Please thank them very much for me; but I don't know what I may have to do this year, though, of course, I should like to come to Avenham exceedingly.'

'Well, I hope you may see your way to it later; but I must not stay now, for I have very little time in town, and a great deal to do in it. I shall imagine the pleasure the flowers will be to your poor people. Shall you give them all away?'

'I think I must give some to Mrs. Wilmot, and just keep a few cowslips for myself; they are my especial pets. But I have so many pleasures, and these poor things have none—most of them. Thank you so much for bringing them.'

As they shook hands, Hope raised her eyes to Walter Fenwick's face and found his bent on her, rather too earnestly she thought, and to her great disgust she felt herself blushing a little. But he was pleased to have met the sweet, upward glance of those thoughtful eyes, and with another hearty 'good-bye' he went out into the street.

He had certainly not come to London for his own amusement, for most of his time was spent in the City, and in such lively places as lawyers' offices—his one recreation being the evening service at St. Paul's, to which he went on finding himself in that neighbourhood. He had no liking for towns, and much preferred the country, where it never mattered how his hat was put on his head, and where he could walk along singing and whistling, leaping stiles and brooks, as he pleased. However, he got through his business, and found himself on Saturday morning speeding down the 'Great Western line *en route* for Avenham.

He settled himself in a corner of the railway-carriage with the intention of thinking over his sermon for Sunday, but found his thoughts going off in other directions. First, they sped in advance of the train to Avenham, and the friends and work there he loved so well; and then his fancy took a flight across the sea, to the missionary and his wife in America.

Presently another vision presented itself to his mind—that of Hope Milford, as he had seen her two days before, bending over the box of flowers, and then raising her fair face to him with a smile playing on it; so happy in the thought of the pleasure those blossoms would give to others. At first he tried to dismiss the vision; but it returned—as it had done constantly since he saw her. He thought of their first meeting at Badgery the year before, and said to himself that he knew scarcely anything of her; but he felt that what he did know drew him towards this girl in a strange

way that he had never before experienced: and he could not deny that it had not been altogether for the better preservation of the flowers that he had chosen to deliver them himself, but that there had been a secret hope of seeing the one for whom they were intended. But it was foolish to be thinking of these things. If they were meant to become more closely acquainted, the opportunity would be given somehow or other; meanwhile, he was to go back and do God's work while it was day.

CHAPTER V.

'Oh, how in words to tell the rest?  
My bird, my child, my dove!  
Behold I render best for best,  
I bring thee love for love.

'Oh, give to God the love again  
Which had from Him its birth—  
Oh bless Him, for He sent the twain  
Together on the earth.'

F. W. H. MYERS.

HOPE did not come to Avenham that summer. She went with her aunt to one of the watering-places on the Welsh coast, though not caring much for such resorts; but she knew her duty, and was steadfast in fulfilling it: and at the end of the time she felt bound to return to London, for Mrs. Wilmot's health obliged her to go away for change, and there was no one to superintend the hospital.

This was to Hope an increasing source of interest, and she possessed unbounded influence in the little wards under her charge, as well as in the homes of sickness that she visited. She revelled in the busy life she led, and was certainly extremely useful as well as

happy; although her kind and watchful friend, Mrs. Wilmot, sometimes feared lest she might rest satisfied with the work she accomplished, and forget that there can be no true service without the constant sitting at the Master's feet and hearing His Word. But there were certainly fewer ups and downs in her spiritual life: the Master was teaching, and well was it for Hope that she was, as a rule, willing to learn.

November had come, with its short, dark days and heavy fogs in London, when one morning she received a letter from Mrs. Wise, saying that Arthur had been suffering so much lately, that she was going to bring him up to London, to be under a doctor for some time, and asking if Hope would come and keep Ruth company—during part of their absence, at all events.

A flush of pleasure rose to the girl's cheek, as she read the invitation, and she went to Mrs. Wilmot's room.

'Go by all means, dear,' said her kind friend. 'You had a very short holiday in the summer, and have had hard work since, as I have been away so long. It will be nice for you to get some fresh air, and a little freedom from responsibility. I sometimes think you are too young for all this nursing.'

'Oh, don't say that, Mrs. Wilmot! I love it so, and don't find it a bit too hard. I couldn't give it up!'

'Couldn't you?' was the gentle answer, with a grave smile. 'Ah, that is a thing we very often say, especially when we are young. But I'm not going to ask you to give up your hospital, dear Hope; at all events, not



yet. If you ever are asked, I trust you will then know it to be the voice of One whom you cannot refuse. Now go and write to Mrs. Wise, and tell her you will come.'

Hope left the room, not feeling quite pleased. Why should Mrs. Wilmot think her too young for the work, when she was so evidently fitted for it by God?

'And,' thought she, 'I'm perfectly right and justified in saying that I *couldn't* give it up. It is because I love it so, and it gives me such opportunities of doing good. I can't pretend that I don't care about it, and would give it all up quite willingly to-morrow.'

Yet, while these thoughts passed through Hope's mind, she had a feeling that they were not quite right—that there was not entire consecration of her will here.

Ruth Wise was on the platform to meet her friend the day she arrived at Avenham, and drove her home in the pony-carriage.

'Oh, Hope, I'm so glad you are come!' she exclaimed, as they drove off. 'I was so afraid you wouldn't, at this time of year, and I should have been so lost by myself. Of course, there's father—I'm not forgetting him—but I want some one to share our den, you know, and do all sorts of things with me.'

'I can tell you, it's a treat to me to come,' Hope answered. 'I wish I could have seen Arthur before I left.'

'Perhaps it's better not,' replied Ruth. 'There's such a drawn look on his face now—so full of pain.'

'Poor fellow! But is he still as bright as ever?'

‘No—not full of fun, and that sort of thing. He can’t be—he suffers too much; though he tries. But I think it is saddest of all to see him try; it is evidently such an effort.’

Ruth paused; and neither spoke for a moment; then she went on :

‘But he is more patient and unselfish and good than ever. He seems so perfectly satisfied with everything. Hope, do you remember what it says at the end of the legend of St. Catherine—that “at last the Lord Jesus had made her *fair enough for Him*”? I often think that He must almost have done that with Arthur. I feel so down, somehow, and as if I can’t get up and shake it off. Just like those clouds on the hills,’ she continued, glancing towards the wild, bare hills, whose summits were veiled in thick mist. ‘They have been down all day; I don’t think they have lifted once.’

Hope felt that the appearance of the damp, sodden lanes through which they were passing, and of the misty landscape, was not cheering,

‘It is like the disciples, I suppose,’ she said. “‘They feared when they entered into——”’ There she suddenly broke off, exclaiming : ‘But look ! look there, Ruth !’

She pointed up a narrow valley among the hills to the right, and there a bright gleam from the setting sun had broken out, and suddenly transformed the cold gray mists, which were drifting along, into a soft, shining veil, hung over the hillside.

Ruth did look, and Hope too, both in silence. At last, the former said :

‘You are true to your name, Hope ; you always find something bright to look at. I don’t believe I should ever have seen that lovely gleam. It has done me so much good.’

‘Wasn’t it good of God to send it just then ?’ Hope said, simply and reverently. ‘I am so glad—are not you, Ruth ?—that the clouds did not lift ; but they were *so* changed by the sun. That’s the lesson we want.’

Hope’s presence in Avenham Vicarage was much appreciated. She was not quite so merry as she used to be—or, rather, her seasons of thoughtfulness were more frequent ; but there was a gentle cheerfulness about her that was very taking, and at times she was as lively and full of spirits as ever.

The day after their arrival, before settling down to their occupations in the schoolroom, she and Ruth were scuffling about the hall. The latter had just stuck a feather brush into Hope’s face, which produced from that young person a yell worthy of a Red Indian, when the hall-door opened and Mr. Fenwick walked in, as he often did. The two girls turned round, and all three looked at each other for a minute, and then burst into a peal of merry laughter.

At last Hope, who had dropped down on a step of the staircase, laughing uncontrollably, recovered sufficiently to greet Mr. Fenwick.

‘I have brought a noisy element into this house, you see,’ she said, still laughing.

'So I think,' was the answer. 'I wondered what was happening as I opened the door. I thought it must be some awful tragedy being enacted, and felt quite afraid to come in, lest I should see pools of——'

'Now, don't go into horrors!' Hope interrupted; and Mr. Fenwick, laughing, turned to Ruth, and asked;

'Have you had any news from London?'

'We heard this morning. Dr. M—— has seen Arthur, but gives no exact opinion yet. He was dreadfully tired with the journey.'

'Poor fellow! But one can't be surprised at that. However, it is a satisfaction that it hasn't made him worse. But I must go about my business now,' he added, smiling, as he proceeded to the study and disappeared within.

The two girls followed his example, and ran down the long passage to Ruth's sitting-room.

'I'm so sorry the Lesters are not at home,' Hope said, as she knelt down to warm her hands at the fire.

'Yes; it's a great pity. If they had been, I dare say I could have got Jessie to come here, and needn't have bothered you.'

'Bothered, indeed! Don't I like it above everything? I love the country at this time of year. There's such a nice damp smell in the lanes.'

'Funny girl! I don't appreciate that smell. They will come home for Christmas, but not before. They

seem in raptures with the Pyrenees, and Lady Alice is so delighted to get through part of the winter in a warm place. By-the-bye, Jessie is "out" now, you know.'

'So I heard. Is she as shy as ever?'

'Very nearly, I think. She is miserable at having to take her part in entertaining now, and still tries to put Ada in her place as much as possible; but, of course, she can't do that at regular parties. She is really happy amongst the poor people; she's not afraid of them.'

'And "Perker"?—as her father used to call Ada. How is she turning out?'

'Oh, she's much the same,' Ruth laughingly replied. 'Very tall and thin still, and full of spirits. But I don't think she's as thoughtless as she used to be—since she was confirmed this summer. Of course, she went to Mr. Carter's classes; but father used to talk to her sometimes, as she is his godchild, you know. She confided to him once, I believe, that a letter you had written to her then had impressed her very much.'

Hope's only answer was a little sound, and then she went to the table and sat down to draw, while Ruth did the clothing-club accounts.

'Has Mr. Fenwick any relations?' Hope asked suddenly, after a long silence.

Ruth looked up, with a little smile hovering about her face.

'Is that what you've been pondering on all this time?'

over the house-tops of Avenham and the meadows around. The sodden leaves of the decaying bracken bent over his path; drops hung from every brown leaf and twig of the stunted oaks that in parts clothed the hillside; but he came swiftly on, occasionally indulging in snatches of song, as was his wont, or frolicking with Jock, who dearly loved these hill-walks.

As the track he was following joined another which ran lower down, he saw, through the deepening twilight, a figure coming up it, at a few yards' distance, which his instinct told him was Hope Milford. His slight pause brought her nearer, and she smiled her greeting, as he lifted his hat.

'Are you alone?' he asked, as they met.

'Yes. Ruth has a cold, and is nursing it to-day, hoping to prevent it from getting bad. I have been for her to some cottages up the valley.'

'Let me take that basket.'

She resigned it to him, remarking :

'It is not a great weight for anyone to carry now.'

'There is something still in it, though,' he answered, as he took it.

'Only my Bible. I put it in there, coming back.'

'You always take your Bible with you on your visits?'

'Not always; but I did to-day.'

'I should take it always, if I were you,' he answered rather abruptly.

Hope looked surprised; perhaps a little bit offended.

'I don't approve of cramming the Bible down people's throats,' she said. 'Very often one only goes in for a few minutes, and the woman is washing, perhaps, and babies squealing and playing about. A few simple words spoken are better at such times, I think; and one can generally recollect some appropriate text, without sitting down to read a chapter.'

'Oh well, I call that taking the Bible with you,' Mr. Fenwick said, looking somewhat amused. 'You take it in your heart and head, and on your lips, though not in your hand, perhaps.'

'That's what you meant, is it? Well, I don't like such very enigmatical remarks as that one of yours,' Hope replied, not looking at all amused. 'Oh, there's a poor little dead rabbit! Don't touch it, Jock! it's not for you.'

'No! leave it alone, sir! Jock!—do you hear? Come to heel!' commanded Mr. Fenwick.

'I shouldn't like to die on such a sad, gray day as this, I think,' Hope said. 'And yet, I don't know—perhaps it would be better. If it were a very beautiful day, I might not be willing to go.'

'What! not to find a still more beautiful day up above?'

'Ah, that's a nice way of putting it,' she answered, looking up with a smile. 'And it would be much better for those left behind to have a bright day. One like this would be so saddening.'

'There would be many who would miss you, I know,' was Walter Fenwick's thought, but he did not give it

expression. And then he wondered if there would be many who would miss him. He believed the Avenham people would, and his sister Georgie ; but then she was so far away, and had her husband and children and her work. His step-mother would miss his help in the management of her affairs, and she was fond of him, he knew, and so were the little boys; he doubted very much whether Ursula would not be rather glad.

The thought was somewhat depressing, and he walked on in silence, till he was startled by his companion suddenly introducing a skip into her walk, and switching about a large piece of bracken. The young clergyman's look of astonishment, as of one evidently startled out of a grave reverie, recalled her to herself.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, laughing; 'I quite forgot I wasn't alone. It's only that I feel so bright and jolly I was obliged to jump.'

'Many people would say this weather was not calculated to make one particularly jolly.'

'I dare say; but I was thinking of all sorts of bright things, and so I never noticed all these gray clouds. Besides,' she continued, 'there are a lot of beautiful things about. Just look at that moss! there's a bit exactly like green velvet, and then that lovely feathery kind; all luxuriating in this damp! And here are those delicious little red fungi! Why, they've made these poor old brown sticks look quite smart!'

'You hold to the principle of looking on the bright side of things, I see, Miss Milford,' Mr. Fenwick remarked smiling.



‘Of course I do!—and so do you!’ she added archly.

‘Are you sure of that? “Blessed are they that expect nothing, for they shall never be disappointed,” you know.’

‘Ah, you wouldn’t get on with Mr. Wise, if that were your motto!’ replied Hope, laughing.

‘Perhaps he doesn’t know my ideas on this point. It is not one of the questions generally asked Curates, when they are being “looked at.”’

‘That’s all very fine! You would not live here nearly three years without his finding out what your principle was. It is one that is continually coming out.’

‘But how do you know I get on well with my Vicar?’ persisted Mr. Fenwick, who enjoyed teasing.

‘It’s not very difficult to see that.’

‘Why, for all you know, he may give me constant blowings-up!’

‘Well, they don’t weigh very heavily on you, then!’ returned Hope, while the sparkle of fun shone in her eyes and smile, and Mr. Fenwick broke into a hearty laugh.

‘You’re not to be baffled, I see,’ he said, as they arrived at the Vicarage gate—‘and I’ll allow you to have the last word in the argument.’

‘How very kind! especially when you can’t say any more!’

‘Oh, but couldn’t I! Perhaps we’ll have another try one of these days.’

‘I shall be quite willing. Good-night.’

‘Good-night. You have the advantage over me, Miss Milford, that you can get my character from Mr. Wise, if you like.’

‘Perhaps I’d better not ask for it!’ Hope replied ; and they parted, both laughing.

There certainly was an attraction for Hope in Mr. Fenwick’s society, though perhaps scarcely acknowledged to herself. Their mutual love of music drew them together when he was at the Vicarage, which was not seldom, for it was always open to him ; and quiet Ruth, who observed a good deal, had a shrewd suspicion that it was not only to ask if the second post had brought any news of Arthur that he so often came up in the evening ; nor did she fail to notice how Hope’s face lit up at his appearance in the drawing-room. But she kept all her ideas to herself, and only wondered if this visit would result in anything. After a time, Hope seemed to grow rather shy of Mr. Fenwick, while he became more and more drawn to her, although he never attempted to force himself on her if she did not seem to desire it, and perhaps he was rather puzzled by the change in her manner.

Ruth and Hope were returning one afternoon from a walk, when, as they came up the street, the former recollected a cottage she must go to, and sent Hope on to make the tea at home. As she took the turn which led to the Vicarage, she caught a glimpse of a tall figure just entering the gate. There was something

unmistakable in the quick jerking walk, though she tried hard to persuade herself that it was Mr. Wise, while knowing that he had said he would probably not be in to tea. She did not wish to have to entertain Mr. Fenwick alone; and yet she could have pinched herself for a certain undefinable throb of pleasure which the mere sight of him had given her. Although possessing many friends, and never thinking of calling herself lonely, yet there was something very sweet to the orphan girl in the possibility of the love of a true, manly heart being given her. However, saying to herself that very likely it had only been her fancy, and that it was Mr. Wise after all, up the drive she went; but on reaching the door, the matter was decided, for in the porch lay Jock. He and Hope had become great friends, and she stopped to speak to him and pull his silky ears; then entered the house, and looked into the drawing-room. Mr. Fenwick was standing with his back to the fire, reading, and tea was on the little table. He closed his book quickly as Hope entered.

‘I must apologize for intruding with no one at home,’ he said; ‘but I want to see Mr. Wise rather particularly, and I suppose he will be in soon?’

‘I should think so—though he said he might not be back for tea. I suppose it is waiting to be made. Ruth has just stopped at a cottage.’

She made the tea, and then went up to her room to take her things off, leaving Walter Fenwick staring thoughtfully at the fire. He was startled in a few moments by a sound as of some one falling downstairs,

and, hastening out, found Hope in a crouching position at the foot of the staircase. There was a slight look of pain on her face, which she tried to turn into a laugh, as he appeared and hastened to her help.

‘It is all my own fault,’ she said, smiling, in answer to his inquiry if she were hurt. ‘I and the kitten had been playing at ball this morning, and, in my careless way, I left it lying about; so coming downstairs, I trod on it and slipped. Will you just give me a hand to get up, for my foot is doubled under me somehow?’

She leant rather heavily on him as she rose, and pressed her lips together, as if to move were painful.

‘I hope there is no real harm done?’ Mr. Fenwick said.

‘Oh no, thank you,’ replied Hope, speaking lightly, because his look and tone were solicitous. ‘I thought at first I might have sprained my ankle, but I believe it was only twisted for the moment; so I may be thankful it is no worse, and that my carelessness was visited on myself instead of on some one else.’

She had made her way—though limping a good deal—into the drawing-room as she spoke; but declined to lie on the sofa, as Mr. Fenwick suggested, though thanking him with her sweet smile when he brought her a footstool on which she might rest her foot.

‘We have heard from Mrs. Wise to-day,’ she observed presently. ‘Arthur is better, and she thinks they will be able to come back soon.’

‘I am very glad of both pieces of news. One always misses Mrs. Wise so much when she is away.’

‘Yes; is she not a model clergyman’s wife?’ Hope replied.

‘I think you and Miss Wise have filled her place very well, though,’ Mr. Fenwick said, smiling.

‘Well, of course Ruth knows all her mother’s ways; so she has managed the various things, and I have been fag and errand-boy. But I shall have to go back to my proper work now.’

‘Shall you? I thought Miss Wise was trying to persuade you the other day to stay over Christmas, and give us a helping hand in all our festivities then.’

‘Oh yes, she did; but that would never do. They can do very well without me here, and we are so busy in London then. Of course it would be delightful,’ Hope added, after a slight pause. ‘Our own Christmas is very happy; but a real family one would be a great treat to me, as I have no home.’

She spoke very simply, and without the least trace of murmuring in her tone; but the words and the wistful look that came into her eyes touched Walter Fenwick exceedingly, more especially that it was the first time she had ever said anything to him about her orphan condition. A great throb of longing to be able to offer her a home, and a love on which she might lean, came over him; and after a moment’s pause he suddenly spoke:

‘Miss Milford, I can’t help telling you—if we might share—share a home and work together? I mean, if

you would be happy with me? I could not give you much; but my love is yours already, if you will have it, Hope.'

Almost unconsciously, in his earnestness, he had laid his hand on the girl's as he spoke the last words, and she did not draw it away, while something in her face told him that he might use the Christian name. A deep crimson flush had overspread her face when the simple, manly words of affection were spoken, and she looked down for a minute, and her lip quivered slightly; but when she raised her head, there was a glad, trustful light in her soft eyes, that did not shrink from the penetrating yet tender gaze they met, as she replied, with a depth of joyful earnestness in her tone:

'Oh yes! and I should like to make you happy if I could.'

Walter's look said that there was not much doubt of that, as he took Hope's hand, and held it in his own large, strong one; and presently he said:

'You will be my star of hope now, won't you? I often need one.'

'I will try always to point to that Hope which is "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast,"' the young girl answered, a sweet and serious smile breaking forth on her countenance.

Walter thought this so beautiful that he could not speak at once; and just then the voices of Mr. Wise and Ruth were heard in the hall. Hope sprang up with crimson cheeks, and saying hurriedly, 'You will tell Mr. Wise,' flew out of the room—forgetting all

about her ankle, which seemed to have got suddenly well—seized hold of the astonished Ruth, with a whispered exclamation of ‘Oh, Ruth, come upstairs! I must tell you——’ and dragged her off.

Hope’s excitement, and the look of bashful delight on her face, with a glimpse she caught through the open drawing-room door of Mr. Fenwick’s tall figure, told Ruth that ‘it’ had come before any words were spoken, and she was prepared to rejoice with her friend when they reached her room and, amid blushes, Hope told her news; while Mr. Wise, somewhat astonished at his young visitor’s conduct, entered the drawing-room, and there received his explanation from his Curate.

About a fortnight later Mrs. Wise and Arthur returned home, the latter having benefited so much from the London physician’s treatment as to be freer from pain than he had been for a long time. Now that she was no longer required at Avenham, Hope felt that she ought to go back to her London work, and accordingly she only remained a week longer at the Vicarage.

The day before she left, Walter Fenwick came up and took her for a walk over the hills. They talked of many things, for there was now nothing to hinder the free interchange of thought which, even before their engagement, had seemed to come spontaneously; and on this last day they had much to speak of to each other.

‘Then you will wait for me, Hope?’ said Walter, as they were returning homewards. ‘I wish it were not

necessary; but I think we have agreed that we ought not to marry till I get a living.'

'Oh no; it wouldn't do. And I don't mind.' Then, seeing Walter's look of pretended surprise and reproach, Hope added, laughing, 'You know what I mean. I'm quite content to do what is right and best, though I *should* like to come to you soon, if I could.'

'I hope you won't have to wait very long, dear. I don't soar very high; but, you see, here we should have to pay for a home, whereas we should get that with a living, although the income itself might not be so very much more.'

'Oh! I'm sure you'll get something soon,' Hope answered eagerly. 'Mr. Wise says you ought to—and something good, too,' she added.

'I don't know about that. Just think how young I am!'

'Well, we won't quarrel over that. Of course, I know you will only contradict me if I tell you that you've got talents and powers for a far greater place than this.'

'Hope! don't say things of that sort to me!' exclaimed the young man, so earnestly that she was startled. 'I dare say I might be a popular preacher; and oh! you can never know the snare it is to me to indulge in dreams of ambition, and to seek after the applause of others. I often fear lest it shall ever be said of me, "He loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Whatever *you* think of my



talents, don't—don't try to make me think highly of myself! You don't know the danger.'

'I never will again, dear Walter,' Hope replied fervently. 'I'm so sorry I did just now. But don't be too desponding about yourself, I'm sure you would never really love man's praise more than God's.'

'I don't know, Hope. This is one of the most subtle temptations; one is so often deceived as to one's motives.'

'Yes, I know,' replied she gravely; but the next moment her smile shone out, as she added, 'But God can make a way to escape from this temptation also.'

'He can,' the young clergyman answered earnestly. 'Hope, I feel sure that God must have put in the hearts of your parents what name to give you; for you certainly inspire everyone with hope.'

'It may have been so; I don't see why it should not. I was not called after anyone: Hope was a favourite name of my dear mother's. She used to tell me she hoped I should be like my name, and I've always tried to remember that, although it's so long since I had her to remind me of it.' And Hope ended with a sigh.

The next day she returned to London, and there entered again into her work with increased earnestness and activity.

## CHAPTER VI.

'Then fearless walk we forth,  
Yet full of trembling, messengers of God :  
Our warrant sure, but doubting of our worth,  
By our own shame alike and glory awed.'

*Christian Year.*

THERE was no immediate prospect of the two young people being married, and things went on ordinarily for some time till one day in March, when, as Hope came in from a round of visits, the servant met her, saying :

'There's a gentleman here waiting to see you, miss. Mrs. Wilmot's out, so I asked him to wait in the dining-room.'

'Who is it, Mary?' inquired Hope, not without a slight colour rising to her cheek.

'Mr. Fenwick, miss ; a——'

She got no further, for, with a bright crimson on her cheek and a joyous exclamation of 'Oh !' Hope sprang to the dining-room door, and Mary retreated, saying to herself :

'So it is the young parson Miss Milford is engaged to ! I thought it must be, but I didn't know.'

‘Why, you dear boy, whatever has brought you here?’

Such was Hope’s greeting to the young clergyman, as she sprang forward to meet him and received his affectionate embrace.

‘Well, I’m sorry I couldn’t give you warning; but I wanted to see you about some business, and thought I had better come up at once.’

‘Business! A living?’ inquired Hope eagerly.

Walter laughed.

‘That is uppermost in your mind, is it? You’re right, though.’

‘Oh, Walter, how delightful! I knew it would come soon! Tell me—what is it?’

‘Now, Hope, this is not a light matter. I want to consider it soberly with you; so can you be grave for a time?’

‘Oh yes, dear. No, I know I mustn’t be foolish—I’m quite serious now.’

‘Very well. You know I told you in my last letter about that poor Mr. Richardson, who was killed out hunting the other day.’

‘Yes. And you have been offered Cotstone? Oh, Walter!’

‘Now, Hope, be steady, there’s a good girl. Yes; it has been a family living, but has now come into the Bishop’s gift, and he has just offered it to me. The place is in an awful state, you know; for it would really almost have been better with no one than with

Richardson. It is a very kind letter. Here, you can read it. I don't know why he thinks so highly of me.'

Hope took and read the Bishop's letter, which was indeed expressed in very gratifying terms. From what he knew of Mr. Fenwick, he said—personally, and through others—he thought he would be just the man to revive the cause of religion in Cotstone, a remote country parish about ten miles distant from Avenham. The late Vicar had been of a type of clergyman happily now very rare—a sporting parson; a hard rider, and, alas! it must be added, a hard drinker. His life and the condition of his parish had been a scandal to the whole neighbourhood; but though it was notorious that Mr. Richardson was oftener to be found in the public-house than in his own Vicarage, his drinking habits somehow never incapacitated him from doing duty in church; and the interest of the churchwardens, themselves the Vicar's boon companions, kept most of his doings from the Bishop's ears. So that the latter had been indescribably shocked and startled when the state of affairs at Cotstone had been revealed to him by the living falling into his hands through the sudden death of Mr. Richardson in the hunting-field. His horse had fallen with him in leaping a hedge; he was taken up insensible, and died in a few minutes, without word or sign of any kind. It was an awful end to any life, but more especially to one spent as his had been.

'It is a nice letter,' said Hope, looking up when

she had finished it. 'And what are you going to do, Walter?'

'That's just the question. It is not a thing to be decided in a hurry. There is much to consider. For one thing, you see, the living is very small.'

'Oh, is it? I didn't notice. Oh, yes! only a hundred and seventy. Why, Walter, that is only forty pounds more than you have now.'

'I know; but there is the house, and our expenses would be very small in such a little quiet place. With our united incomes, we should have about three hundred and fifty a year altogether, I believe.'

'Then you think if you took it we might be married?' exclaimed Hope eagerly.

'Perhaps; but I don't like to think much about that side of it. It would be solemn enough for me to go to any place where I should be entirely responsible for the souls of those there; but it's still more so when one thinks what Cotstone is. It would be a tremendous charge to take upon myself.'

Hope's face had become very thoughtful.

'Yes, it would,' she replied seriously. 'And we mustn't think about whether it would enable us to marry. But, Walter, don't you think you could undertake it?'

'I can hardly say, Hope. I almost think it wants some one with more experience.'

'What does Mr. Wise say?'

'He wishes me to go; but he says it must be a

matter for me to decide. Still, he thinks that God is calling me to this work.'

'And don't you think so yourself?'

'Yes, I almost think He is; and if it is so, God forbid that I should shrink back!'

'It seems to me like a call from Him,' Hope said. 'You see, it would be a place where you would have very little of the temptation you dread of seeking men's applause; because, with such very ignorant, rough people as they must be there, you'd have to keep your deep ideas and beautiful language in the background, and be very simple—wouldn't you?' she said, smiling. 'I don't suppose you'd get many compliments, and I dare say there might be a good many failures at first. There! I'm not very like Hope just now, am I? But I've seen so much here of work amongst thoroughly low, neglected poor, and I know you have to try one thing after another before you can get hold of them. And the Cotstone people would be the same, I suppose, only of a different class.'

'Yes, there's a great deal in what you say,' Walter answered. 'I dare say it would be a very good place for me in many ways; the only question is, should I be a good man for the place?'

'Well, that is as God thinks. If you just put yourself in His hands, I think he would use you there. But I'm almost afraid of encouraging you to take any living, for, oh! I do long to be with you, dear—though I think I'm willing for God just to arrange it. But we

mustn't let any motives of that kind influence us now.'

'No; that we mustn't. Thank you, dear, for trying to keep them from me. But you don't think it would be presumptuous in me to undertake such a work?'

'It can never be presumptuous to engage in any work, when God calls us to it,' Hope gently answered. 'If He calls, He gives the strength; I have been finding that out lately. And you know, Walter, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."''

'True. Well, I'll think more about it. And as I must be going now, let us kneel together and ask for guidance.'

'Where are you going? When did you come up?' Hope asked, when they had risen and stood together silently for a little time.

'I came up by the first train this morning, and I'm now going on business into more civilized parts than these,' replied Walter, smiling. 'And I shall go back quite early to-morrow morning.'

'Well, look here! We have a temperance meeting to-night, at eight o'clock. I wish you'd come and speak at it.'

'I should like it very much; but you must get Mrs. Wilmot's consent.'

'I'll go and ask her now,' Hope said, rushing off upstairs; but she came down again the next minute, saying,

'Here's a bore! She's out. But, Walter, come here a little before the time, and if they don't want you to speak, you can sit among the audience and have your mind improved.'

'I shall be quite agreeable. You will be there?'

'Oh, yes. I am going to sing.'

'That's jolly! What will be your song?'

'Nothing very new. "But the Lord is mindful," and a small solo in a part song. I don't think it will be jolly at all, to have you sitting there. It will make me very nervous, and I dare say I shall spoil everything.'

'Nonsense! you won't be such a goose. Now, good-bye, dear, for the present. We *expect* the answer to our prayer, don't we?'

'Of course,' Hope answered, smiling brightly as she raised her face to receive Walter's kiss, and off he went.

He returned to Avenham the next day, and then went over to Cotstone. It was a lovely spot, lying among the great heath and bracken-covered hills; for this was further west than Badgery and Avenham, and Exmoor was not very far distant. But rich green 'combes' ran up the hill-sides, and in the valley, where stood the village, were fertile meadows, noble trees, and clear running streams. The little church was old, and not without some points of architectural interest and even beauty, but was in a shocking state of repair, and all the interior and exterior arrangements slovenly in the extreme; sheep grazed in the churchyard, which



was utterly neglected, many of the graves having been trodden over till they were hardly to be distinguished, and the head-stones thrown down or broken. Most of the people had a hard, defiant look ; and as Walter Fenwick stood in the church porch, he said to himself, “ Every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.”

A new-made grave lay close to the path, and the sexton, who had conducted Walter into the church, and whose irreverent behaviour there had inexpressibly shocked and pained the latter, now saw the young clergyman cast an inquiring glance towards it.

‘ That’s parson’s grave,’ he said. ‘ Well, he’s got to lie still now, and hard work that must be for you, old fellow ! However, he’s got the brandy bottle with him, that’s one comfort. George Thomas, at the public yonder, put one filled to the brim into his coffin with him. ’Twas a kind thing to do to an old chum ; but I’m afeard ’twouldn’t last him long. It must be all gone by this time, and what he’s a-doing without it, I can’t think.’

Walter had been so taken aback and horrified at this man’s coarse and profane speech, that he had been unable to speak at first ; but now he found words.

‘ Oh, my friend, remember what you are speaking of !’ he exclaimed. ‘ The soul that never dies is the only part of your poor Vicar that lives now, and that is not lying here ; and what can a brandy bottle do for that ?’

The man responded with a coarse laugh :

‘ Well, all I know is that, whenever my turn comes, I’ll go nowhere that I can’t get my beer and spirits !’

Walter answered nothing. He felt that it was useless to talk, and could only hope that his companion was not quite sober at the present moment. But as he stood by that mound of fresh earth, he said within himself:

‘ Please God, I will speak His words of warning and love to these people, “ whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear ”; and into this place “ I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God.” ’

Two days later, Hope received a letter in Walter’s well-known wild scrawl; she opened it eagerly. He told her of his visit to Cotstone, and of what he had seen and heard there.

‘ And, Hope,’ he continued, ‘ as I stood by the grave of that unhappy man and heard those awful words from one of his parishioners, God’s voice did indeed seem to be calling me to the work in that place, and I could no longer doubt or shrink back, as I fear I may have done before. I have talked the matter over several times with Mr. Wise, and also with Colonel Lester—and I know how much you think of his opinion—and both think I ought to undertake the work. I believe the same myself; and therefore I humbly say now, “ Master, here am I, send me.” ’

Hope felt truly thankful that this was Walter’s decision. Constantly and earnestly, during the last few days, she had prayed for guidance to be given him;

but she had believed herself that he was meant to go to this place.

She now passed on to the rest of the letter.

‘I shall not go there for about three months,’ Walter wrote—‘and I hope Mr. Wise will have found another Curate by that time. Now, Hope, what do you wish to do? I believe I shall find wickedness rampant in Cotstone, from all I hear. Will you enter upon the work with me, or wait till I have been there a little time—say, a year—and have got to know the people and the condition of the place? Remember, I can offer you nothing but a very small income, and work which I expect will be very uphill and very saddening. It is not what I should have liked to be able to give you; but you can choose for yourself.’

Hope’s answer to this letter was pretty clear as to her own wishes.

‘If you would rather that I should wait,’ she wrote, ‘I am quite willing; but, oh! Walter, dear, I would like to be at Cotstone with you from the very beginning—knowing and sharing, as far as I could, all the difficulties. And if the work will be so discouraging, all the more you will want *Hope*, won’t you? We can quite subsist on that income, I’m sure. I’ve always been poor, and so I am accustomed to economise. If you will let me, I’ll go to Cotstone with you, from the first. I don’t want you to be struggling alone there for any time.’

This letter settled the matter; for Walter had only wanted to hear what Hope really wished; himself, he

had longed intensely to have her with him when he went to his new charge. So it was finally arranged that they should be married early in June, at the end of which month he would become Vicar of Cotstone.

CHAPTER VII.

‘Love all for Jesus ; but Jesus for Himself.’

*Imitation of Christ.*

THE soft air of a warm June afternoon blew gently, as an open carriage, drawn by a pair of perfectly matched horses, drove swiftly through the extensive and tastefully laid-out pleasure-grounds that surrounded a large mansion in the north of England. There were two occupants of the carriage ; Walter Fenwick and Hope —no longer Milford, but bearing the same name as the young clergyman by whose side she sat.

They had now been married a fortnight, and he was bringing his bride on a visit to his home. She had not yet seen her new relations ; for Mrs. Fenwick either fancied herself, or really was too unwell to come to the wedding, and her daughter Ursula, for some reason or other, disliked the idea of a sister-in-law, and made an excuse of her final examinations before bidding farewell to the school-room. So they had been married very quietly in London, and after a fortnight spent in Scotland, were now returning southward.

‘What lovely grounds these are !’ Hope exclaimed

delightedly, as they drove through the luxuriant shrubberies, with occasional vistas cut in them, and interspersed with smooth lawns.

‘Yes,’ Walter answered. ‘Old Mr. Graham had a great deal of taste, I believe; and art, judiciously employed, has supplied the deficiencies of nature in the place. For, as you have observed, the formation of the ground in our neighbourhood possesses few beauties, and there is hardly a fine tree in the place.’

‘So I see now. I never noticed it before, though; the shrubs have grown so splendidly.’

‘Yes; but wait till you see the flower-garden and the rhododendron-walk! That must be in its beauty just now, by-the-by. Mamma has inherited her father’s love of a garden, and she’ll show you everything.’

‘Oh, Walter, that reminds me—what am I to call her?’

‘Why, anything you like, of course.’

‘No, but really! I don’t think I could quite call her “mother.”’

‘No, dear. Georgie and I always called her “mamma” as children; and, somehow, since we grew older, we have never felt inclined to change. But don’t call her Mrs. Fenwick; she will be hurt, if you do.’

‘Oh, I shouldn’t think of doing that! it would sound horrid, with you calling her “mamma.” But, I say, Walter, I do wish I could have seen your people before! I’m getting so horribly nervous; I have the

fidgets all over me, and am quite cold, and damp, and nasty-feeling.'

'Silly child!' Walter replied, laughing. 'Why should you put yourself in this fuss? I can promise you, you needn't be afraid of mamma. I believe she really was very sorry not to be at the wedding, and she means, I'm sure, to welcome you quite as another daughter; remember the kind letter she wrote you! Indeed, I hope you will be a daughter to her, for Ursula is not what she ought to be.'

'Ah, Ursula! Really, you know, she is the one I'm afraid of. I'm sure she doesn't like me.'

'How can you tell, when she has never seen you? Though it certainly was not an affectionate letter she wrote with her present. But she had better not glower at you in my presence!'

And Walter knit his brows wrathfully; but laughed and smoothed away the frown, as the carriage drove round the broad gravelled sweep, and drew up within the lofty colonnade that fronted the house.

He descended from the carriage, greeted the old butler pleasantly, and then handed out his wife. She said nothing as they passed through the lofty, spacious hall, hung with pictures, and full of statues and *objets de vertu* of all kinds—but looked with a grave, rather pale face; then, as the butler opened a door at the farther side, she suddenly became very hot and crimson-cheeked, and did not look up till they had entered the apartment, and she heard her husband's voice in words of greeting.

They were in a room of great size and loftiness, with windows opening to the garden, down one side, and a deep bay at the further end; the furniture and decorations of the richest kind, but not gorgeous, and the air fragrant with the scent of flowers, which were seen everywhere—in the room, the garden, and the conservatory. Hope was impressed with the evident lavish expenditure and luxury of this abode, which exceeded any she had ever seen, familiar though she was with the comforts and elegances of Badgery Court.

But she had not time for more than a glance round. A pale, small-featured lady, with smooth, almost white hair under a little lace cap, rose from the sofa on which she was reclining, as soon as the travellers entered, and came forward to meet them. Walter had her first greeting, and then she turned to where Hope stood, looking shy and girlish, blushing under her shady straw hat.

‘How do you do, my dear? I’m so glad to see you at last.’

The voice was rather languid, but soft and gentle, and the affectionate kiss that accompanied the words reassured Hope. Her cheeks cooled a little, and she responded to Mrs. Fenwick’s greeting with a warm kiss and winning smile.

‘Come and sit down, dear,’ continued her mother-in-law, and led her towards the sofa, when Hope perceived that Walter had gone forward, and was speaking to a girl, whom she had not noticed before, bending



over a book in a curious, doubled-up position of some kind in the distant bay-window.

‘Well, Ursula, have you nothing to say to either of us?’

‘Don’t know, I’m sure,’ was the short answer, without moving or looking up.

‘Well, really, I didn’t think that this time I should come home and find Ursa Minor here—much less Ursa Major; but it seems I was mistaken.’

‘A very good thing for you, too—to discover that you are not always infallible.’

Walter made no answer to this, but continued:

‘But now, Ursula, come and speak to your sister.’

Now, this was the most unfortunate thing he could have said, for it was just the fact of having a new sister to which Ursula so objected. If he had said ‘Hope,’ or ‘my wife,’ she would not have minded so much; but to have this strange girl spoken of as *her sister!*

Therefore she paid no attention to Walter’s words, and his brow was beginning to contract and his blue eyes to gleam rather ominously, when Mrs. Fenwick’s voice was heard:

‘Ursula dear, come and speak to Hope.’

She rose then, and came forward; but her ‘How do you do?’ was cold and formal. She just took Hope’s hand and dropped it, and merely stuck her cheek against the other’s lips, so that the kiss was all on her part. Then she retired to an armchair at a little distance, and said nothing more.

She was a bi , bony girl, a good deal taller than

Hope, and utterly without any grace in her figure or movements; brown complexioned, with dark hair cut short, a large mouth with regular white teeth, and a good forehead above a pair of small, deep-set, restless, dark eyes. Her whole expression and appearance were unattractive, and Hope could hardly believe she was Mrs. Fenwick's daughter, when she looked from the small, slight figure in rich black silk by her side, with massive gold ornaments, and little hands glittering with rings, to the big awkward girl opposite, in a dress of the plainest brown holland, and disdaining all ornament but a serviceable-looking brooch that secured her collar.

'Would you like to come to your room, my dear, or to have tea first?' Mrs. Fenwick inquired presently of Hope.

'Here comes tea,' Walter said. 'Let's have that first, mamma. I don't suppose you are in a great hurry, Hope? and some drink will be acceptable.'

'What an expression to come from a teetotaler!' Hope exclaimed, with a laughing glance at her husband, who was leaning over the end of the sofa beside her. 'But I am quite ready, too, to have tea first.'

'Are you a teetotaler like Walter?' inquired Ursula abruptly.

'Oh yes, I've been one a long time,' Hope replied, glad to have any attention from that young lady, although the question was not asked in the pleasantest tone.

‘ Oh ! ’ accompanied by a sort of snuff, was the only answer she got.

‘ This is a curiosity, evidently, ’ Hope said to herself, feeling amused rather than offended at Ursula’s ungracious manner, though the unsisterly reception certainly disappointed her.

The conversation during tea was entirely between Mrs. Fenwick, Walter and Hope ; Ursula, having received her cup of tea, possessed herself of a piece of cake, and went to the window, where she shared it with a St. Bernard and a collie dog, who were lying outside ; and from this distance she observed the new member of her family.

There was certainly nothing in Hope’s appearance that could offend this girl, who, brought up in a most expensive and luxurious household, had tastes and habits utterly contrary to those of her relations—despised all show in dress—hated the customs and restrictions of society, and cared only for the wild pursuits and sports of country life. But the young bride’s simple washing-dress and straw hat were as plain and sensible as even Ursula could wish ; neither ought she to have objected to anything in her manner, which was quiet, bright, and perfectly unaffected. But perhaps it was just the sweetness of her smile and the pleasant tone of her gentle voice that annoyed Ursula, as being so unlike her own manner ; anyhow, she was determined not to be pleased.

‘ I see she’s a regular holy piece of goods, ’ she said to herself, as she heard Hope speaking with animation

of her hospital work. 'As if it wasn't enough to have Walter taking up all that nonsense, but he must now plague one with a wife of the same kind! However, she shan't have anything to do with us, shall she?' Ursula continued, nestling into her dog's ears, and finishing her speech there.

Tea over, Mrs. Fenwick proposed to take Hope to her room.

'Thank you; but shan't you be tired? you haven't been well. Won't Ursula take me upstairs?' said Hope, looking with a smile towards the girl in the window.

Ursula looked up, but said nothing, and her mother answered,

'Oh no, I'll come up with you; I shall like to see you properly settled. Hope has the south room, Walter; so you will know where to find your dressing-room when you want to come up.'

'All right—thank you,' he replied, and walked into the conservatory; but as soon as Mrs. Fenwick and Hope had departed, he came back, and went up to his sister.

'Really, I am rather surprised at you, Ursula!' he said. 'Is this the way you intend to treat my wife?'

'I've a right to behave as I choose,' was the reply. 'Shake a paw, Oscar.'

'It's all very well for you to shirk a question,' Walter went on. 'I thought you would at least treat Hope with civility and some kindness. She has no sister of

her own, and hoped she would find one in you ; but I can't say it looks much like it.'

'No—nor will,' replied Ursula, with a short laugh. 'I don't want a sister ; and perhaps you'll remember that you're not my real brother, and of course she's still less.'

'No ; and you don't deserve to have her for a sister ; and if you miss all the love and friendship she's ready to give you, it will just serve you right !' Walter answered sharply, stung by the last unkind speech ; and then he stepped out into the garden.

Ursula looked after him with an unpleasant smile on her face ; but was much disgusted when the two dogs rose up and ran after him.

Walter took a turn or two with them, and then came back.

'Ursula,' he said, 'I spoke hastily to you just now—it wasn't right—I beg your pardon. But please to remember, when you speak of Hope, that she is my *wife*, and I cannot hear her spoken of rudely. If you choose to slight her, I can't help that.'

He waited for no answer, but entered the house and went upstairs.

Meanwhile, Hope had been conducted to her room by her mother-in-law. Their progress thither had been slow ; for Mrs. Fenwick's movements were not quick, and Hope had frequently stopped on the stairs and along the corridors to admire the pictures, many of which were by eminent artists.

'I see you know what is good painting,' remarked

Mrs. Fenwick, gratified by Hope's undisguised admiration of the beautiful things that abounded on all sides.

'Walter told me you drew very well.'

'I am very fond of it; and I found no end of subjects up in Scotland,' she answered.

'You must let me see your sketches. I used to be very fond of drawing myself, when my health was better; and Bernard—my youngest boy, you know—will be a real artist, I think.'

'I am so sorry not to see the boys this time,' Hope exclaimed. 'I want to make acquaintance with my new brothers.'

'They were sorry, too, that they could not see you. You must manage to meet when their holidays come. This is your room, my dear,' as she opened the door into a large room, with delicate pink-and-white draperies, and two windows, looking over the grounds in different directions.

Hope gave an exclamation of delight, and sprang to the window.

'What a lovely room! and the flowers! how delicious!'

'I am glad you like it,' Mrs. Fenwick said. 'It is one of the prettiest rooms in the house.'

'It's very good of you to give it to me,' Hope answered, smiling.

'Why, my dear, a bride always has the best of everything!'

Hope laughed.

'It seems so funny to think of myself as a bride.' I

don't suppose I shall feel much like one when our honeymoon is over and we settle down to work at Cotstone.'

'Ah, dear, I wish you were not going there. Walter will be quite thrown away.'

'I think not,' Hope replied gently. 'If God has called him to go there, as we believe, He will find work for him to do.'

'Oh, there will be plenty to do, I've no doubt. But such a dreadful heathenish place as it seems to be—dear, dear! I don't like the thoughts of your going there at all. And he ought to have some London church, with an educated congregation, who would appreciate him. Why, my dear Hope, just think of his talents! He has enough to make him a most popular preacher.'

'I know he has,' the young wife answered, blushing with pleasure and pride; 'but I don't think popularity is the best thing for anybody. Walter would be very young to have a large church, you know; and if he can bring God's message home to the Cotstone people, I think he will be quite satisfied.'

'Well, of course it was for him to decide; but I can't understand how you, dear, could advise him to bury himself in that place. And, then, it is such a miserable living, or rather, a starving, I should say.'

'Oh dear no, we shan't starve at all!' Hope replied, laughing merrily. 'I think we shall do very well; there will be so few expenses in a little out-of-the-way place like that.'

'I suppose so,' Mrs. Fenwick answered, with a sort of sigh. 'I only hope you won't find it very dull. I could not do without plenty of society.'

'I hope we shall be too busy to have time to be dull. And then, our friends the Wises and Lesters are not so very far off, you know.'

'No, I am glad of that. And if you ever are in want of anything, come to me, my dear. I consider Walter my child, and so are you now,' Mrs. Fenwick said, looking up at Hope with an affectionate smile.

The latter bent down and kissed her warmly, saying:

'Thank you, mamma.'

'Ah, I am so glad to hear you call me that! I wish you were going to be nearer me; it is so nice to have some affection shown one. I get plenty when Lionel and Bernard are at home; but at other times there is not much.'

Hope looked at her mother-in-law with a pitying expression, but said nothing. The latter continued:

'I hope you did not mind the way Ursula behaved to you, dear? She is very odd, and takes great prejudices.'

'Oh no,' Hope answered cheerfully. 'I dare say we shall get on better when we have made more acquaintance.'

'Well, I hope so; but she is very perverse, and she does not like Walter. But it is too bad of her to dislike you, and shows her bad taste, too,' said Mrs. Fenwick, who had been much taken with her daughter-in-law.



Hope blushed ; she did not like this sort of speech, and her colour grew still deeper the next moment, when Mrs. Fenwick laid her hand on the thick waves of brown hair, saying admiringly :

‘What beautiful hair you have, child ! I’m so glad Walter has chosen a pretty wife.’

Hope laughed to cover her confusion, and then thought it sounded rather foolish and affected. However, Mrs. Fenwick now rose, and, saying that she would leave her to unpack, quitted the room.

In the corridor she met Walter.

‘Here you are !’ she said. ‘I have only just left Hope ; we have been having a regular talk.’

‘I’m glad of that. I want you to get to know her properly.’

‘Oh, I feel that I know her now, Walter ! She is a dear girl, and much prettier than I imagined from her photograph, or from what you said.’

‘Is she pretty ?’ Walter asked, looking as if it were a new idea to him ; ‘she never struck me as being so. Of course, it’s a most charming, sweet face, and full of thought and intelligence ; but I never knew she was anything of a beauty.’

‘No more she is ; but what a stupid, blind fellow you have been !’ Mrs. Fenwick answered, laughing. ‘Of course, her features are nothing ; but she has lovely eyes and hair, and a pretty complexion, besides a nice figure. Oh, she is very attractive-looking ! and there is something so bright about her look and manner ; she gives one the idea of being an impersonation of her name.’

‘That’s just what she is!’ Walter exclaimed delightedly. ‘I never knew such a girl for looking on the bright side of things. It will be such a blessing to have her with me at Cotstone.’

‘Yes; you will want cheering up there, I expect. I have been talking to her about it; but she seems as enamoured of the place as you. It’s very nice to see that hopeful spirit in young people; I only hope she won’t have a lot of trouble that will crush it out of her, poor child.’

‘I think her “hope” is too deeply seated to be affected by outward trials. It is “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast,”’ Walter replied.

‘Ah, my boy, you are young, too—you don’t know the sorrows of this world. One can’t expect to carry a very light heart when one has lived as many years as I have.’

‘No; not a light heart exactly, perhaps,’ Walter said. ‘But our faith and hope ought to grow stronger as we experience more and more of God’s love. Oh, mamma, I wish you would just cast all your care on Him!’

‘It’s easy for you to talk, dear Walter; but, as I said before, you do not know.’

And, as if she did not like the turn the conversation was taking, Mrs. Fenwick went downstairs, and Walter, with somewhat of a sigh, proceeded to his wife’s room. He found her on her knees, engaged in unpacking.

‘Oh, Walter,’ she exclaimed, as he entered, ‘isn’t this a lovely room!’

‘Yes, it’s very jolly; but this isn’t the first time I’ve seen it, you know.’

‘Of course not! I forgot. I can hardly get on with my unpacking for looking out of window.’

Walter established himself in an armchair, from whence he watched his wife trotting about the room.

‘Yes, there’s no lack of comforts in this house, certainly,’ he remarked. ‘Is your general impression a pleasant one, Hope?’

‘Yes,’ answered she. ‘It’s a lovely place; and I like mamma very much. She’s so kind—I don’t think one can help liking her. And Ursula entertains me.’

‘I’m glad if you are only entertained by her. I was afraid she would make a worse impression.’

‘Well, you know, I can’t say I like her; but I was saying to mamma just now, that I dare say we shall get on better in a day or two.’

‘I won’t tell her about my little passage-at-arms with the bear,’ said Walter to himself. ‘I’ll leave her to find out what Ursula is like, and perhaps she may succeed in making friends with her.’

‘She has not at all a sweet disposition, naturally,’ he said aloud, ‘and I’m afraid she has no desire for the grace that could overcome it.’

‘That was such a queer remark about teetotalism!’ said Hope, laughing. ‘Was she pleased at my answer, or not?’

‘Oh no! she thinks it most absurd of people like us to take the pledge. Mamma doesn’t like it either; but if she disapproves of a thing she always expresses it in

the mildest terms, instead of in the strongest, like Ursula. But I generally get a talking to on this subject when I come here, and am told that I shall come to an untimely grave through drinking no wine; and I dare say you will have a share now.'

Hope laughed merrily, and then looked grave.

'I'm sorry for mamma,' she said. 'She doesn't speak as if she were happy.'

'I'm afraid she isn't. She never seems to have any peace or rest, though I do believe that at the bottom she really is a Christian; but she has always lived in the midst of such great luxury, and in this very gay neighbourhood, and it drags her down.'

'She doesn't like your going to Cotstone at all.'

'No; I knew she would not, but we can't help that; and I wish we were there already,' was Walter's reply; and, just then, a knock at the door and Hope's 'Come in' were followed by the appearance of Ursula's head—nothing more.

'Mamma wished me to tell you that dinner is at seven,' she said.

'Oh, thank you. Come in, Ursula; we're not doing anything.'

'No, thank you, I'm busy,' and the head vanished.

When they assembled in the drawing-room before dinner, Ursula appeared in a white grenadine with crimson stripes, very lanky and much flattened, and altogether dowdy in appearance—a great contrast to Hope, who looked very fresh and blooming, in white muslin.

‘My dear Ursula,’ said Mrs. Fenwick to her daughter, in an undertone, ‘I thought you would have put on a better dress, and not this common, everyday thing. I am quite vexed you should be seen in it.’

‘Well, I’m sure Hope is spruce enough to make up for any of my deficiencies,’ Ursula replied. ‘And I don’t see why I should put on anything different for her.’

‘You might have known I should not like it, dear. This frock is really not fit to be seen,’ said her mother, in a querulous tone.

‘Dinner’s announced. Are you coming?’ Ursula asked, cutting short the conversation.

Mrs. Fenwick sighed, and turning to her daughter-in-law, smilingly offered her her arm, and led her to the dining-room.

Ursula remained as silent as she could all through the meal, replying to the remarks Hope addressed to her, in the endeavour to draw her into conversation, by monosyllables, or the briefest sentences.

‘I’m going out into the garden,’ she announced, when they came out from dinner.

‘And I dare say you will like to do the same, Hope,’ Mrs. Fenwick said.

‘I should very much; it looks most tempting out of doors.’

‘You had better have a shawl, my dear.’

‘I don’t think I shall want it, mamma; but I’ll get one, in case I do.’

‘I’ll fetch it for you,’ Walter said.

‘You’ll find a white knitted one just inside the wardrobe, and don’t pull all my things about!’

Walter went off upstairs, three steps at a time, and Hope saying pleasantly to Ursula, ‘Shall we go out, then?’ they stepped out on to the terrace.

‘Are your dogs gone to bed?’ Hope asked.

‘Yes.’

‘They looked such beauties. I hope you will introduce me to them to-morrow.’

‘I wonder you care for dogs.’

‘Why? Oh, because I’ve lived in London, I suppose! But I used to have a dog some years ago, and I delight in animals of all kinds, and country life. I’m so glad we are going to live in the country.’

‘Yes, I should hate a town; and London people are always nasty.’

Hope laughed.

‘Am I to take that remark as applying to myself?’ she asked, hoping to draw Ursula into a joke.

‘Just as you like,’ was the answer, without any sign of a smile.

Here Walter appeared.

‘I couldn’t find that white thing, though I rummaged about for it a long time; but I met Baker, and she gave me this of mamma’s.’

‘It’s a much nicer one than mine; but you must be as blind as a mole! I suppose you have found that out some time ago?’ she added, turning with a smile to Ursula.

‘He’s blind sometimes, and at other times rather too

sharp-eyed—just as it suits him,’ Ursula replied. ‘And rather too sharp-tongued, too,’ she added, under her breath.

‘How long have you been free from the trammels of the schoolroom, Ursula?’ Walter inquired.

‘About a fortnight.’

‘Are you considered “out” now?’

‘I suppose so. Mamma says I’m to “come out,” as she calls it, at the race ball.’

‘When is that?’

‘The first week in August. But I don’t know that I shall go.’

‘If mamma wishes you to go, and you’ve no better reason for refusing than that you think balls a nuisance, you ought to go.’

No answer was made to this remark.

‘Have you races in this neighbourhood?’ Hope asked.

‘Yes, a few miles off.’

‘It must be very bad for the place.’

‘I don’t see that. I like the races very much.’

‘Do you go to them?’ Hope asked, looking rather surprised.

‘Certainly. Oh, I suppose you think them wrong?’

‘I don’t think they can be very improving to anybody, and I certainly should not like to go myself.’

‘No, of course not; but I don’t set up for being a saint.’

‘Ursula!’ began Walter; but Hope touched his arm, and he checked himself.

‘Yes—what were you going to say?’ his sister asked, looking round with a most provoking coolness.

Walter did not answer, and Hope turned the conversation by admiring a magnificent rose. They presently went indoors, and the rest of the evening passed in music and pleasant conversation with Mrs. Fenwick, Ursula sitting apart with a book.

‘Hope, my dear,’ said Mrs. Fenwick, a few mornings after Walter and his wife had come to Storr House, ‘we are going to have a dinner-party to-night. Shall you be willing to help me in entertaining?’

‘Oh yes,’ replied Hope, looking up from her writing. ‘But I haven’t had much experience of that sort of thing, you know.’

‘You will manage all right, I’m sure. Ursula is so tiresome; for she will only be friendly with the people she likes; any others she either snubs, or leaves completely alone. So it makes it rather hard work for me.’

‘I’ll do my best to help you, mamma. Do you want anything doing now? any menu-cards writing?’

‘I gave those to Ursula, thank you, my dear. I am going to keep quite quiet to-day, as I shall want all my strength for this evening.’

About six o’clock that afternoon, Mrs. Fenwick, looking worried, came into the drawing-room, where Hope and Walter were practising a duet to sing that evening.

‘Here has Ursula forgotten those menus! I found them on the library-table just now, where I gave them to her this morning—not one touched! I shall have



to set to work and do them now, for I believe she's out riding or walking somewhere.'

'No, you won't do them!' exclaimed Hope, springing up. 'Give them to me, mamma; I'll finish them off in no time.'

'My dear child, you have done so much for me to-day—arranging all the flowers here; and now you are stopping your pretty singing. No, I will do them.'

'No, go and sit down!' and Hope playfully forced her mother-in-law on to the sofa, and possessed herself of the packet of cards. 'I'd give some to Walter to do, if he didn't write such a dreadful hand.'

'Ursula deserves to be ducked under the stable-pump!' said Walter wrathfully.

'I don't suppose she meant to leave them,' said her mother apologetically; 'she only forgot.'

'“Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart,”' was Walter's reply.

'Yes; but she has not exactly wrought any evil, poor child; and as Hope is here, and doing them so kindly, it will be all right.'

'Ah, it's a good thing for Ursa Major that she has a mother to make excuses for her,' Walter observed, smiling; and then he devoted himself to 'helping' his wife with her writing; which help consisted in spelling all the words wrong, and pronouncing them in such a ridiculous way, that she could hardly write for laughing.

'Are you ready, Hope?' asked Walter, appearing from his dressing-room shortly before the dinner-hour.

‘I heard a carriage come just now, so we had better be going down.’

‘Oh, wait for me, Walter dear! I really couldn’t face a room full of strangers alone,’ said Hope, fastening some flowers in her hair. ‘There now! I can put on my gloves as we go down;’ and they went together along the corridor and down the great staircase.

There was a sound of voices in the drawing-room already, and when they entered, and Hope saw a number of unknown faces, she felt very bashful, and not at all as if she were a married lady, who no longer needed a chaperon. One or two people near the door looked round as they entered, and a gentleman greeted Walter with a hearty hand-shake and ‘How are you, Fenwick? Glad to see you again!’ to which he responded by entering at once into conversation; and poor Hope felt very much out in the cold, till she spied Mrs. Fenwick; and, touching her husband’s arm, whispered, ‘I’m going to mamma,’ and departed.

‘Is that Mrs. Walter Fenwick?’ asked his friend. ‘I’ve never congratulated you, my dear fellow; but you ought to have introduced me to her.’

‘So I ought; but I forgot she didn’t know everyone here, as I do. Never mind; you shall make her acquaintance later on.’

Just as Hope reached her mother-in-law’s side some guests had been announced, to whom she was talking, and Hope stood silent for a minute or two, till Mrs. Fenwick perceived her, and said, with a smile, ‘Oh,

here you are, my dear! This is my daughter-in-law, Mrs. Leigh,' and introduced her to the lady with whom she was conversing. After a few pleasant words, Mrs. Leigh introduced her daughter, a pretty girl, and with her Hope got on very well.

Presently Mrs. Fenwick came up, accompanied by a tall, pleasant-looking young man, whom she introduced to her as Sir Hugh Wilton. Hope's young lady companion appeared to know him well, and the three chatted pleasantly together till dinner was announced, when Sir Hugh gave Hope his arm, and conducted her to the dining-room. Arrived there, she enjoyed conversing with her partner and looking at the gay scene around her.

Mrs. Fenwick, at the head of the table, looked elegant and refined in rich black silk and point-lace, with magnificent diamonds; while, at the other end, Walter was apparently making himself very agreeable to his lady partner and those near him. Opposite Hope, Ursula was talking and laughing with great animation with the young man by her side. Sporting conversation it seemed to be, Hope thought, from the snatches she occasionally heard of it.

'Your husband has got a living somewhere in the south, hasn't he?' inquired Sir Hugh of Hope, after a time.

'Yes, in Somerset—not very far from Exmoor. Quite a little place.'

'Oh, I know that part of the country. I often go there for the stag-hunting.'

‘Yes, that is all round where we shall be; but our village—Cotstone—is very remote.’

‘Cotstone! You don’t say you’re going there? Why, that’s the place where that fellow Richardson was! What has become of him?’

‘Didn’t you hear? He was killed out hunting just at the end of last season. It was a most awful thing.’

‘Well, it’s only what he deserved. He was a disgrace to his profession.’

‘Yes,’ Hope replied gravely. ‘But it is a dreadful thing to think of such a man being cut off in that sudden way.’

‘Oh yes, of course,’ was the answer, but in a light tone. ‘Fortunately, there are not many like him.’

‘No, I hope not; but don’t you think that a great many people are really as unprepared to die as he was?’ Hope asked.

The turn the conversation had taken seemed to give an opportunity for perhaps speaking a message from God to a careless heart, and she felt she ought not to let it pass.

‘Well, I dare say there are,’ Sir Hugh replied. ‘One knows Richardson was not the only scoundrel in the world.’

‘Do you think one must be a regular scoundrel in order to be unfit to die?’ Hope asked gravely, and yet she could not help smiling a little.

‘Oh, well, I don’t know. But, I say, Mrs. Fenwick,

don't let's be talking about dying now. It's rather out of place when we are meant to be enjoying ourselves. Both of us young, too, and you a bride! What would your husband say if he heard you?

'He wouldn't think there was anything strange about it,' Hope quietly answered, undeterred by the tone of gay banter. 'I don't see why it is so out of place to talk about death. I should have thought one could "enjoy one's self" much more, if one knew that death would not be a quite unlooked-for thing.'

'Well, you see, I've been in the navy till three years ago, when my poor father died and I came into the place; and all sailors are, more or less, fatalists.'

'Are they?' Hope said demurely. 'In other words, that is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," isn't it?'

'Well, I suppose you've about hit it,' Sir Hugh answered, amused, but yet in a tone as if he did not quite like the sound of it in the words Hope had used. 'I must say I think one is intended to get as much amusement as one can in the world.'

'Yes, I suppose amusement is the only thing the world can give us; but, you see, amusement *can't* last for ever, and I don't think you would like to feel, when you came to die, that your life had been spent in amusing yourself.'

'No, no; but here you are again at the old subject of dying!' the young man exclaimed, half-laughing, half-annoyed, yet looking at Hope with a puzzled expression

as he heard her very serious tone. 'I never heard anyone as young as you talk like this before. I don't think you can be any older than I am. Excuse me,' he added hastily, as Hope, though not in the least offended—it was impossible to be so with his simple, boyish manner—yet could not help opening her eyes in slight surprise and amusement; 'my wife is always reproving me for my blunt sailor manners. I hope you didn't think me very rude?'

'Not in the least,' Hope replied, smiling, and hastening to reassure him. 'I like sailors' unsophisticated ways. We are so conventional on land. No, I'm not very old, certainly; but I think, for that very reason, it's all the better that I should begin now to spend my life as I should like to have spent it, supposing I had sixty or seventy years to look back upon when I came to die.'

Sir Hugh did not answer, and remained silent for a moment; then he said suddenly:

'Mrs. Fenwick, would you mind telling me why you have been talking to me in this way?'

'Do you wish me to tell you the actual reason?' Hope asked, looking straight at him.

'If you please—unless you would rather not; but you puzzle me.'

'Well,' she said, her colour deepening a little, 'it is just because God has given me one great work to do, and that is "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord;" and as a people is made up of individuals, I must try to get hold of first one and then another.'

'And of course you think I'm not prepared?'

'Do you think your fatalist motto sounds exactly as if you were?' Hope asked.

Sir Hugh shrugged his shoulders, and gave a queer little laugh.

'You have me there. But I had an idea that that text referred to St. John the Baptist. Do you think you have the same work to do that he had?'

'Yes, in a certain degree; but I think I have my warrant pretty clear in another text—"Let him that heareth say, Come." I have heard God's call to me to be His servant, so of course He gives me work to do for Him now.'

'And you mean that you like it? Suppose I had laughed at all your solemn speeches just now?'

'I don't suppose I should have liked that, being only flesh and blood,' Hope candidly admitted; 'but it would be only what He tells His servants to expect; and I would rather be His servant and be laughed at for doing His work, than having an easy life without Him.'

'But I don't see that you can expect everyone to care to take up with this sort of thing, eh?'

'They would care, if they knew how much better it is than anything they have before, and how much more they can then enjoy any pleasure.'

'Better? how's that?'

'The pleasures God gives never disappoint one, as all earthly ones do—more or less—and they last for ever,' Hope answered.

Somehow or other, a change here came over Sir Hugh's face, and he replied, with some contempt in his tone :

‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’

‘They’re not in the bush!’ Hope rejoined, quite indignantly, apparently amusing her companion again; but at that moment the ladies rose from the table, and no more could be said.

Later on in the evening there was music. Hope and Walter sang their duet, which was much appreciated. Many admired both the voices and the young couple, as they saw them side by side at the piano—he, with his keen, intellectual face, and in his strictly clerical attire; for, careless of appearances though he was in a manner, he never saw any reason why he should be a whole clergyman in his dress in the daytime and only half one in the evening—and she, looking very quiet and graceful and entirely absorbed in her music.

After others had performed, Hope was asked to sing again.

‘What are you going to sing now?’ asked her husband, coming up to her, as she stood looking over her music.

‘I should like to sing something sacred. Walter, do you think I might sing “He was despised”?’

‘Yes, do. But have you got it here?’

‘I can sing it by heart.’

She sat down to the piano, and, as she played the introductory notes, glanced her eye over the room.



For a moment, her heart sank at the thought of singing this before that gay assemblage; but a silent uplifting of her heart to God brought courage, and though her fingers trembled a little, there was no falter in her voice. The talking grew less, soon after she had commenced, and presently there was complete silence in the great room. It might have been partly out of respect for the sacred words, and partly because of the exquisite pathos and sweetness of Hope's singing; but she was fain to believe that the bitter woe of the 'Man of Sorrows' was touching some hearts—more especially when, venturing a quick side-glance towards the end, she saw Sir Hugh Wilton standing by the conservatory door, with an expression of thoughtfulness on his handsome, open countenance.

She saw no more of him till the guests were departing, when he came up to her.

'Was that another piece of your work, to sing that solemn thing, Mrs. Fenwick?' he asked, speaking carelessly, though she fancied he felt rather more than he showed.

'Certainly; one should sing as well as speak for God.'

'Well, I think it was very plucky of you. I heard a chap say that Fenwick had married a Methodist!'

'No, I am a Churchwoman,' was Hope's reply, in the most matter-of-fact tone; but Sir Hugh caught the twinkle in her eye.

'Capital!' he exclaimed, laughing. 'I wish Gil—the fellow could have heard you say that! he would

have felt small ! It was rather too bad of me to tell you, I believe ; but I couldn't resist the wish to see how you'd take it. Good-bye, now. We must get to bed early, for we are off to-morrow to the Fullerton steeple-chases and the ball in the evening—and then there's the archery meeting the next day !'

Hope believed this programme of gaieties was given her out of a sort of a bravado, to make her think that all she had said had had no effect whatever ; but, as she said to her husband afterwards, ' I am sure there is a great deal of good in him, and he might be made very nice—he is so honest and straightforward ;' and she did not forget to pray that the seed, which she had cast with a possibly trembling, but still faithful hand, might not merely fall by the wayside and be snatched away.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘Go, labour on ! spend and be spent ;  
Thy joy to do the Father’s will ;  
It is the way the Master went ;  
Should not the servant tread it still ?  
Go, labour on ! ’tis not for nought ;  
Thy earthly loss is heavenly gain ;  
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not ;  
The Master praises—what are men ?’

BONAR.

AT the end of the following week, Walter and Hope quitted Storr House for their new home. They had to leave by an early train, as they intended to make the journey in one day, and the summer sun was beginning to decline when they reached Cotstone, after a four miles’ drive through the lanes. Most of the cottagers came to their doors to look at them, but responded by a vacant or half-defiant stare to Walter’s friendly ‘Good-evening.’

The little Vicarage looked pretty, with roses, clematis and ivy climbing up the veranda that ran along the front rooms, and peeping in at the upper windows. Somewhat small though the rooms were, they looked

attractive, freshly painted and papered, and with their new furniture ; and Hope was charmed with the view from the front, down the sloping lawn and over a field to a willow and hazel-fringed stream, beyond which the ground rose gently towards a bare, breezy-looking hill.

‘We shall be able to make it a dear little place, shan’t we, Walter?’ she said. ‘And when we get the pictures and china here, we shall look quite pretty. Oh, it is so delightful to think that this is my home—my home with you!’ she added, looking up at him with an affectionate smile.

‘I’m glad you are pleased with it, dear,’ he answered, drawing her towards him. ‘I cannot say what I feel at seeing you here at last, as mistress of this little place. But things in the parish will not look as *couleur de rose* as our home.’

‘No; but we are prepared for that,’ she rejoined quickly. ‘And God will help us.’

‘Yes,’ replied Walter earnestly. ‘And, next to Him, you, my Hope, will help me; and we shall see this place very different in time, if God spare us to work together.’

‘Oh, don’t speak as if we might be parted soon, Walter!’ Hope exclaimed, her lips quivering, and tears springing to her eyes.

‘I hope it may not be so, indeed,’ was the fervent answer, as he clasped her closer; ‘but we can’t forget that “in the midst of life, we are in death.” But we won’t talk of sad things on our first evening here. I

want you now to kneel with me, and let us ask for our Father's blessing, before we begin our life here.'

So the young husband and wife knelt down side by side; and, assuredly, the prayers then offered for themselves and the flock around them were real. And such prayers, presented in the One Acceptable Name, are never vainly offered.

'What are you going to do this morning, Walter?' Hope asked the next day at breakfast.

'I have my sermon to prepare for to-morrow; but I thought I would take you first to see the church, if you like.'

Hope readily agreed, and, shortly after, the two set out.

'You'll preach in the afternoon, I suppose?' said Hope.

'Yes. In the morning I read myself in. Mr. Little is coming over for it, you know; I hope there's something for him to eat?'

'Oh yes, plenty; and with that beautiful fruit we brought from Storr, our table will look quite grand. What is your text to be? Do you mind my knowing?'

'Not the least. "To you is the word of this salvation sent."'

'That is a nice one for your first sermon.'

'I wanted something quite short and simple. I must be very brief indeed, I'm sure, though it is no easy matter to set forth this salvation briefly. I expect they don't know much about it, poor things.'

‘Then it may be more welcome to them than to others who are so familiar with it.’

‘Yes; but it will be an awfully solemn time for me. The responsibility is tremendous.’

‘I know it,’ Hope replied. ‘But there are many we know praying for you, Walter dear.’

‘That thought holds one up. Isn’t the state of the churchyard dreadful? I must get these sheep turned out as soon as possible.’

‘It is a nice little church in itself,’ Hope remarked, when they came out, after looking all round; ‘but in such a state of dirt! And with those horrible high pews!’

‘We must get something done to it as soon as we can,’ Walter said. ‘It is not really out of repair—I have ascertained that; it only wants cleaning and renovating. Did you know that mamma has promised me fifty pounds whenever I begin on it?’

‘No; has she? How good of her! Who plays the harmonium, Walter?’

‘Mrs. Shaw, the schoolmistress; but she knows hardly anything about it. I told her that you would play, and she was very glad to give it up. Both she and her husband are constantly tipsy, I believe. We must get rid of them as soon as possible.’

‘Yes, indeed; how dreadful! It doesn’t look much of an instrument.’

‘Oh, it’s a most horrible squeaky thing; makes the vilest sounds, sometimes; I tried it one day when I was over here. But we must put up with it till

we can get something better. Now I must get to work.'

'And so must I,' said Hope, throwing off her hat, and proceeding to unpack the box of china that stood in the hall.

In the afternoon Walter sallied forth into the parish, leaving his wife still busy in the house; but after a time she finished her work, and went out to see if she could meet him. She did not know which way he had gone, but turned her steps along the road where stood most of the cottages. The greater number looked dirty and dilapidated, and the gardens were a wilderness of weeds, among which a few flowers and vegetables struggled for existence.

Hope did not find her husband; but had a charming walk, and made friends with some small boys whose kite had become entangled in the branches of a tree, from whence she succeeded in dislodging it. Afterwards she stopped to speak to a woman standing at a cottage-gate, but was not favourably received; and, returning home, found Walter seated in the veranda, reading, with Jock lying at his feet. He rose as she appeared, and gave her his chair, seating himself on the ground beside her, while she told him of the events of her walk.

'And what have you been doing, Walter?'

'I went first to see Mr. Wilson, the farmer to whom the churchyard has been let, and have arranged with him to remove his sheep.'

'What sort of man is he?'

‘Oh, a jolly sort of fellow—civil and friendly enough, but as godless as any of them, I imagine. The number of oaths he used was frightful.’

‘And then, did you go to any of the cottages?’

‘Yes, to one or two, and spoke to some of the people whom I saw in their gardens. They are not so much opposed to one as I feared; indeed, the women seem to be wanting a friend, poor things, and to be very glad to see one. The men will be the hardest to get hold of, I expect; and all, I fancy, are about as dark as heathens.’

‘Yes; but if we can get them to look on us as friends, that will be a great thing. I wonder if many will come to church to-morrow?’

‘I dare say they may; they will want to look at us.’

‘A sort of wild-beast show!’ Hope said, laughing. ‘But I hope they will come, if it’s only for that; they may get some good.’

But the Fenwicks’ expectations were not realized. Not even to gaze at the new parson and his wife could the greater part of the Cotstone people make up their minds to endure the tedium of church. A few came in the morning and stared at the two clergymen, and at the figure in fresh, simple white dress and bonnet, presiding at the harmonium. In the afternoon hardly a man appeared; but some of the women came, and did their share of staring. The reverent reading of the service was evidently a novelty to them, while the sermon astonished them still more.



Walter was true to his intention of being extremely brief and simple; but to be addressed with affectionate earnestness, as if the preacher really cared about them, was something quite new; while it is to be feared that the 'old, old story,' which he declared to them, was hitherto almost unknown to all.

Walter had used his authority as Vicar for the first time before the service that afternoon. In the morning a number of lads collected in the churchyard, and through the whole of the service were shouting and racing about outside. On inquiry, it was found that this was the customary thing to do; but Walter was not going to allow it. In the afternoon they were assembling for the same purpose when he and his wife entered the churchyard.

'Are you coming into church, boys?' he asked pleasantly, stopping short.

The boys looked at each other and at him, but made no answer till the question was repeated, when a 'No' was elicited.

'Then I think you had better not be loitering about here. I don't know if it was you who were making all that noise this morning?'

Grins and nudges.

'Well, you know best about that; but all I want to say is, that I can't have anything of that kind again. You know we come to church to worship God, and we can't do that very easily with all you fellows whooping and skylarking about outside,' the clergyman said with a smile. 'Besides, a churchyard isn't the place for

that sort of thing. The dead lie here; and I don't like to see graves walked over as if they were the ordinary ground. So, if you won't come into church—which is what I wish you would do—just go out quietly, and make a noise in the fields, if you want to—will you?’

The boys hesitated a moment, and a few seemed inclined to resist; but the new clergyman's kind yet firm tone, and the steady eye with which he regarded them, had a power over them, and they slowly quitted the churchyard.

Walter waited till the last had gone out, and then saying, ‘Thank you, my lads,’ went into the vestry.

‘How well you managed those boys, Walter!’ Hope exclaimed afterwards. ‘They couldn't resist you a bit; and that “Thank you” at the end completed the conquest.’

‘I can generally manage those young fellows; but they would not come to church, you see. How few were there!’

‘Yes; and it was so sad to see the vacant look on the faces when you were preaching. It seemed so perfectly new to them, and they looked as if they couldn't understand or believe it.’

‘Poor things! they have been so sadly neglected,’ the young clergyman replied. ‘But I trust “the Day-spring from on high” is now visiting them.’

The next week was devoted by Walter and Hope to going through the whole parish, making acquaintance with all the people. The receptions they met with

were various—some welcoming them gladly, others looking upon them with evident suspicion; while into a few houses they were altogether refused admittance. All the people were extremely rough and uncouth in manner, and though many were disposed to be friendly, any religious turn of the conversation was evidently not liked.

‘It will be tough work, Hope,’ Walter said, about a fortnight after they had come, as they sat discussing parish matters in the evening. ‘The parish is so scattered, you see, that, unless people have some very strong motive, they won’t come from those little remote cottages in the hills to church or anything; and one doesn’t know how to get hold of them.’

‘No, it will be difficult; and, really, the number of public-houses, in a bit of a place like this, is dreadful.’

‘Ah! we shall have some battles there! Harvesting will begin next month, and the drinking will be awful then, I’m afraid. We had quite enough trouble with it at Avenham, even after the years that Mr. Wise has been working there.’

Walter’s expectations were fully realized when August came. Both before the harvest commenced and during it, he and his wife toiled, day after day, among their people, endeavouring to persuade them to refrain from indulging in such fearful intemperance—but in vain. The example which had been before them for years had had but too much influence, and drunkenness ran riot in the parish, from one week’s end to another.

‘I’m going into the village, Hope,’ Walter announced, one Sunday afternoon before service; ‘I’ll see if I can stop any of the men from going into the public-houses.’

He took his hat and went.

Church-time drew near, but he had not come back; and Hope grew rather fidgety lest, in his zeal, he should have forgotten the hour. However, she presently heard the hall-door open, and went out to meet him, but stopped short, in amazement and terror.

There he was!—his hat battered—his clothes covered with dust, as if he had fallen down—and blood flowing from a cut on his forehead. He did not appear to see his wife, and made no answer to her terrified exclamation of ‘Walter!’—but staggered past her into the drawing-room, and sinking into a chair, buried his face in his hands with a groan.

‘Walter, dear, what is the matter? Do tell me!’

Hope came to his side and spoke with pale, trembling lips; but there was no reply, and she flew off for warm water and a sponge.

‘Let me bathe your forehead, dear,’ she said, gently removing his hands.

He made no resistance, and she washed the cut, and bound it up with a skilful hand, relieved to find that it was not of any great depth; but the look of suffering on his pale face was what alarmed her.

‘Are you hurt anywhere else, dearest Walter? I wish you’d speak. But drink this first.’

He took the sal volatile she gave him, and then said :

‘No, I’m not hurt—you needn’t be frightened. It isn’t that.’

‘Then what is it? what has happened?’

There was a pause, and then he spoke in a low, hollow tone :

‘I never thought it would come to this! As I was coming home, I saw the Red Lion was full of men, and I went in to try and speak to them. They were all more or less tipsy, and didn’t much like it. I spoke strongly—and, suddenly, one of them snatched off my hat, and then they all set on me.’

He stopped, and covered his eyes with his hand for a minute, but soon proceeded :

‘They struck me—threw cans of beer at me; and at last two great fellows threw me right out into the porch. I got up directly, of course; and then they threw me my hat, amidst shouts of laughter, and I came home.’

A groan finished the sentence, as Walter buried his face again in his hands.

Hope knelt by his side, unable to speak; and presently he looked up, and saw her soft hazel eyes flashing with an unwonted fire, her lips tightly pressed together, and her whole frame quivering with indignation. The sight seemed to bring back some of his wonted energy.

‘Hope!’ he said quickly, sitting upright, ‘you must not be angry at this. They were none of them in their right minds, poor fellows.’

‘But, oh, Walter! such a cowardly, mean thing to do! A whole roomful against one man! and their clergyman!’

‘Of course, if I had resisted, they would not have found it quite such an easy job; but it was not for me to do that. I’m not angry—but to think that *my people* should have treated me in this way! O God! it is a bitter experience.’

And the next moment Hope saw a tear start out of his eye and roll slowly down. He did not wipe it away, and she felt that there was, indeed, nothing unmanly in it; but she said nothing, awed by the evident depth of his trouble, and feeling that not even his wife could fully sympathize with him, as pastor of this flock.

After a time, Walter again looked up, and said:

‘I believe it’s just time for church, Hope; I must go.’

‘Dear Walter, you’re not fit to take the service.’

‘Yes, I am. I’m not hurt, Hope—I’m not, really; only rather bruised. Give me a bit of sticking-plaster for this cut, and then I shall do all right.’

‘But suppose you were to faint in church?’

‘Nonsense! I’m not going to make such an ass of myself. Now, don’t look scared, silly child! but go and put your things on. The service will do me good.’

But the smile with which he spoke died away, and as Hope left the room she heard the words, accompanied by a deep sigh:

‘Oh, the wickedness of this place! am I the man for it, after all?’

‘Walter must not despond,’ she said to herself; ‘and I must forgive as he does. How good he is! Such a terrible insult to a man! and from his own parishioners! But still, these are the people God calls him to work amongst, and all are not so bad. We won’t lose heart—we must not.’

With such thoughts in her mind, Hope was not a little startled to find what was the first Lesson that afternoon—the nineteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings—and glanced meaningly at her husband. She thought there was rather a peculiar expression on his face, as if he had been struck by the strange appropriateness of the subject to what had just occurred and his own feelings; but he read steadily on till he came to the solemn question, ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’ and the prophet’s answer—‘I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’

The firm voice faltered, but gathered strength again, and he proceeded steadily as far as the words—‘Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.’

Then Hope was startled by a pause and a sudden quaver in his tone, and glanced up in surprise; but it passed at once. It was enough, though, to fill her mind with a scarcely acknowledged dread. ‘Did

Walter think that he was going to be taken away from his work? Perhaps he was more hurt than he thought at first, and he had hidden it from her, in order to be able to speak his Master's message once more.'

Such thoughts crowded into her mind, making her heart throb and the blood rush to her face; but the rest of the service went calmly on, and after they had gone back to the Vicarage she did not venture to ask any questions. Walter was very tired, and she made him rest quietly all the evening, while she sang in the summer twilight the sacred songs and hymns he loved most—for music was ever the best solace to him.

They had had prayers, and the servants had gone. Hope said :

'You will come to bed now, Walter dear, won't you?'

'No, not just yet—I'd rather not. But you go, dear; you have had a great fright, and had better sleep it off.'

She did not answer, but came up to him, and stood playing with the loose wave of hair above his forehead.

'Well, what is it?' he asked, looking up at her with an affectionate smile.

'You are quite sure you are not hurt?' she asked slowly. 'You don't feel ill?'

'No, not at all. I'm bruised and stiff; but then we must expect that. Why, I've often come to much worse grief than this! I had my collar-bone broken at football at Eton, and once I was half-drowned!—not to speak of sundry hurts received once or twice in a fight, which I dare say you will be very shocked to hear.'

Hope smiled.



‘I was so afraid you might be worse than you chose to tell me.’

‘No; if I felt anything was wrong, I wouldn’t hide it. But I don’t believe there’s any harm done; so go quietly to bed, like a good child.’

He kissed her affectionately, and Hope departed, feeling reassured. She had not liked to ask him why he had faltered at those words; but forebodings did not press long on her spirit, and his assurance that he was not hurt had removed the fear from her mind.

But there was no rest yet for him. Long after the house was quiet, the clergyman was on his knees in his study. The souls of his parishioners—especially of those men who had that day so meanly assaulted him—were a burden on his spirit, such as he had never felt before. Since he had been Curate to Mr. Wise, he had learnt to feel far more the deep responsibility and importance of his calling—to an extent that he had never dreamt of in the first few years of his ministry, though always earnest, and desiring the true good of those among whom he laboured. But at Avenham he had but been Curate. The chief responsibility lay upon his Vicar; and even had Walter Fenwick not been a truly good man, the Gospel of Christ would still have been faithfully preached to the people. Here, he was alone. He was the one man appointed to speak God’s message in the place, and for each one of these souls he was accountable. And they were hardened; they would accept of temporal gifts; but when he strove to give them the one Gift he was commissioned to offer—when he spoke

to them of their sins, they turned against him! Yet, if he stayed here, he must do as he had already done. Had God indeed called him to this place? was he not too young and inexperienced to cope with such wickedness as he found here? should not another man be anointed prophet in his room?

But then came the thought—he had believed that it was no other than God's voice that summoned him to Cotstone, and the discovery of great evils and obstacles was not a sign that he had been deceived. One failure was not a total defeat; and who should so earnestly and continuously warn these poor sinners of coming judgment, and strive, by word and example, to win them to the foot of the Cross, as the man they had injured? If he left Cotstone, another might come who did not know as much of God's Truth as had graciously been made known to him; and then, would not the blood of these men be upon his head? Some awful words came to Walter's memory—'Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; *because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.*' Oh, God forbid that he should ever bring that curse upon himself! No! he would stay; he must stay.

But now, recognising these people as his appointed charge, their wickedness came upon his mind with overwhelming force. They would not ask forgiveness for themselves; then he would confess their sin and plead for pardon for them. But they were so set

against God, and how was he to touch them? 'Who is sufficient for these things?' was his cry.

He was alone with his God, and to that God he turned for help. No one else could give it him, and to no one else could he reveal his deep agony of soul over his flock; not even to his wife—precious and helpful as her bright, trustful spirit was to him; to none but the God who for ages past has yearned over fallen man with a mighty love that none can fathom. And as Walter Fenwick knelt low in His Presence, and humbly claimed to have the promise, 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' fulfilled in him, the peace of God descended upon his soul, and in firm trust he said, 'I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.'

'The King hath laid His hand  
On the watcher's head,  
Till the heart that was so worn and sad  
Is quiet and comforted;  
And the soul is strong once more to stand,  
And face the wrath of all the land,  
With His message dread.'

## CHAPTER IX.

‘And thou, O crafty serpent,  
Who seek'st by many an art,  
And many a guileful winding,  
To vex the quiet heart :

‘Depart, for Christ is present ;  
Since Christ is here, give place ;  
And let the sign thou ownest  
Thy ghostly legions chase.’

*Ancient Sunday Evening Hymn.*

‘So you have begun your work at the church?’ Colonel Lester observed, as he sat one November day in the dining-room at Cotstone Vicarage, having ridden over there that morning. Walter had been called to see a dying parishioner, and after waiting some time for him to come in to luncheon, Hope decided that they could not delay any longer; so she and Colonel Lester were alone together.

‘Yes,’ she said, in reply to his remark; ‘we are getting on very well, on the whole; but we can’t do all we wish yet. Walter thinks we must get to know the people better, and feel our way more, before we can

get rid of those horrible old sheep-pen pews, for instance.'

'Do you sit in a sheep-pen?' Colonel Lester asked, laughing.

'No, happily. The Vicarage pew is just as bad as all the rest, but I play the harmonium, and that stands close to the reading-desk; so I escape.'

'What are you doing there, then?'

'Cleaning it up generally; and then I am very busy instructing the choir, and that sort of thing.'

'The choir! that's a new institution, surely.'

'Yes; and it's hardly worthy of the name, as it is. We can get so few to join—we have no men's voices; but I hope we may get on better, in time. Walter is going to have a grant of hymn-books from the S.P.C.K., and with these and various little improvements we have been able to make, we expect to come out quite ecclesiastical-looking on Christmas Day.'

'You intend to make your startling effect then? Well, I want to give you a Christmas present; would you like something for your church?'

The light shone out of Hope's eyes and the colour in her cheek, as she exclaimed:

'Oh, Colonel Lester, that is good of you!'

'I'll tell you now what I thought of, to see if it's what you would like. I thought of a good large harmonium, as your present instrument isn't much, is it?'

Hope sprang up from her chair.

'It's the very thing we want! I was saying the

other day that I never could teach the choir properly with that horrid little thing; but Walter said we mustn't take any of the money Mrs. Fenwick has given us for that, because we should want it whenever we re-seat the church.'

'All right. Then you shall have the harmonium for Christmas Day.'

'It is kind of you, Colonel Lester! Thank you so much. How pleased Walter will be!' and just then her husband entered.

'Hallo! I didn't know anyone was here. How do you do, Colonel Lester? this is an unexpected pleasure.'

'Oh, Walter! What do you think?' exclaimed Hope. 'Colonel Lester is going to give us a new harmonium for the church!'

'No! not really? That is kind of you! What a welcome addition it will be! You must come up and see what we are doing, after dinner.'

'You are getting on better altogether in the place, are you not?' Colonel Lester asked presently.

'Yes, there is certainly an improvement. For one thing, we have got rid of the former schoolmaster; and the present man and his wife are really good people, and will, I hope, be of great use to us. We have a proper Sunday-school now, though it is sadly small; but we have been tempting the children with the prospect of a Christmas treat, and I hope the bribe is taking effect with the little brats.'

'So you are obliged to use such unworthy arts?' Colonel Lester observed, smiling.

'Yes; but I hope they are not altogether unworthy. We have to be "made all things to all men, if by any means we may save some,"' the young clergyman replied.

'And have you any special "works" in the parish, Hope, besides the choir?'

'I am trying to have a mothers' meeting; but, like the school, that is very much in its infancy. Then, we have started a clothing club, which is much more popular, and the poor things will find it a great help, I'm sure; for wages are so low, and then so much of the money goes to the public-house, alas!'

'Is the drinking just as bad?'

'I'm afraid so; though some do acknowledge now that it is a terrible thing; but they don't seem as if they could leave it off. But with the new year I hope to start a branch of the Church Temperance Society,' said Walter. 'Will you come over and speak, when we do? I shall try to get Mr. Wise.'

'Any help I can give you I am only too glad you should have; but you and Wise can both plead the temperance cause far more eloquently than I.'

'No, no! your sober, well-weighed words are quite as impressive as more vehement ones,' Hope responded.

'Well, I can only say that I hope your various efforts will succeed here; in fact, I feel sure they will, in time.'

‘We pray that it may be so,’ Walter said, ‘and I know you don’t forget to pray for us.’

‘Of course not—I think of you constantly. By-the-bye, I hear your two young brothers are coming after Christmas.’

‘Yes, we hope to have them then ; Hope has not seen them yet, you know.’

‘What a houseful of wild colts you will be ! for the parson and his wife will be just as bad as the juveniles, I expect ! You must bring them over some day to Badgery, and refresh Ada with the sight of a boy.’

Hope was looking forward to making acquaintance with her new brothers, and was much delighted when, at the end of the first week in the new year, the two young Fenwicks came from Storr House. Cotstone Vicarage was then very lively ; but in due course the holidays came to an end, and Lionel and Bernard departed. Then Walter and his wife settled down to their work again.

Up to this time they had not found the remoteness of their village any objection ; for the weather had been open, previous to Christmas, and fine, frosty days had prevailed while the boys were with them, so that the eight miles’ walk to their town and back was rather agreeable. But now came a heavy fall of snow, which lay on the ground for some weeks. It did not affect their supply of provisions, but lay too thickly in the lanes round Cotstone for any carriage to come there, and consequently they saw not a single visitor



all this time. To plough through the snow to Duncombe was far beyond Hope's strength at this time, and being without a carriage, she really never got out of the parish for six weeks. Her husband did not seem to mind this; and also, he had not been so utterly secluded. Well protected by strong boots and leggings, he had twice made an expedition to Duncombe, besides a visit to a neighbouring clergyman. Moreover, having always lived in the country, he was accustomed to a quiet and somewhat solitary life, and was now completely wrapped up in his work at Cotstone.

But Hope missed the companionship she had been accustomed to in London. There, she always had plenty of people with whom to talk over her work and theirs, and from whom to get fresh ideas; subjects of great interest were always being brought forward and discussed, while, when nature demanded a little break in the routine of labour, there were always friends to see, or some other little recreation procurable. She loved the country, and had not thought she should ever be dull there—nor was she, as long as she had plenty of occupation; the parish was a real and very deep interest to her; but, now that she was so much shut up, she missed the excitement which there is in every London life, whether it be passed in fashionable amusements, or in the more serious, but to some natures possibly quite as dangerous, succession of services, meetings, and various kinds of religious work. Hope had not thought she would feel the want of this

excitement, and she was displeased with herself for being now discontented at the loss of it.

‘Why should I be hankering after something new?’ she said to herself. ‘Isn’t there enough of God’s truth for me to find out yet? “things new and old” in His treasures? And then it’s so horrid of me to be wanting Mrs. Wilmot, and Helen Crawford and other people, when I’ve got my own dear Walter. But he does annoy me—just because he’s so satisfied here! If only he’d say, “I wish this horrid snow would go away! it’s awfully slow not seeing a soul,” I should be ever so much more pleased and better-tempered. But he doesn’t; and he won’t, I know. And he never seems to see that I’m dull, or to remember that I’ve not been accustomed to be mewed up in this way. He seems to forget altogether that I’m not well enough to go stalking about through this snow as he does, and when he comes in there’s never any talk except about parish matters. Of course, it is the only subject—shut off as we have been all this time from the outer world; but Walter never seems to get tired of it, or to want anything else, and I do—particularly now that I’ve got this horrid cold. And yet it’s not right of me, and I ought to enter into all his interests as if they were my own; and it’s no excuse to say I don’t feel well. But, oh! I do wish this weather would break up, and let me get out again! I won’t say a word to Walter about my feelings, though. If he can’t see for himself that it’s been rather mopy work for me all this time, I’m not going to tell him.’

It was a pity Hope made this resolve; for, while vexed with her husband for not sympathizing with her of his own accord, she would not now give him the chance, by confiding to him her longing for a little change, and her fears that it was wrong. So she went on much the same. Her bodily condition was rather low, and this affected her spirits; and she was, perhaps, trying to get the better of her failings too much in her own strength.

However, the weather did change at the end of February, and mild days, which heralded spring, succeeded. Hope hailed them with delight; and was still more overjoyed when, on one of the first of these days, she received a note from Lady Alice Lester, asking them to come to Badgery for a couple of nights.

‘Oh, Walter!’ she exclaimed, looking up from the letter, ‘isn’t this delightful? the Lesters want us to go over next Monday for a couple of nights! The Wises are coming to dine on Tuesday, with the Archdeacon and Mrs. Gray, who will be staying with them; and only think! Colonel Herbert, who commands our old regiment now—my father’s, you know—is at Badgery! Won’t it be jolly?’

Walter looked up from his piece of buttered toast.

‘I don’t see how we can very well go,’ he answered. ‘There’s a temperance meeting on Monday evening, besides your mothers’ meeting on Tuesday.’

‘Well, I think that can be missed for once; and the temperance meeting too, I’m sure.’

'I don't see that. If these things are to do any good, they must be regular; and I don't think it will increase our influence if the people see us leave our work for pleasure at the first opportunity.'

'The first opportunity! well, I dare say it is, in a way,' Hope replied rather scornfully. 'But to hear you speak, one would think we had only just come, and then were going off amusing ourselves—instead of having been working for nine months without a day's break, or missing a single engagement. And then, as soon as we are asked out for two nights, you put an extinguisher on it! If no meeting or class is ever to be put off, we stand a good chance of never going anywhere.'

Walter looked surprised at all this.

'What are you putting yourself in this state for?' he asked. 'It isn't as if you can never go to Badgery at any other time.'

'I can go at some other time, I dare say; but one doesn't often get the offer of the carriage fetching one, and I don't suppose I should ever have the chance of seeing the Herberts again. But as to you, Walter, you never seem to think how I've been shut up for the last six weeks, not seeing a creature. You forget what a different life I've been accustomed to in London, and I can tell you it's been very dull and wretched. And then, as soon as we have the chance of a little enlivenment and pleasure, you treat it as quite wrong, and throw cold water on the whole thing. I do think it's rather hard!'

Hope's voice quivered, and there were indignant tears in her eyes. This provocation had come upon her quite unexpectedly; and, irritated by the 'wet blanket' which her husband threw on this invitation, she lost her control, forgot that temptation should not and need not be yielded to, and gave vent to all the pent-up feelings of soreness and discontent of the last month.

As to Walter, he looked amazed at first, never having heard Hope speak so sharply before, and for a moment a cloud gathered on his brow, and his keen eyes flashed; but *he* did not yield. Rising from the table, he said, gravely and rather sadly, and without looking at his wife:

'I'm very sorry you miss your London friends so much, dear. I thought I should have been able to make you happy here—I meant to do so;' and then he left the room.

There was no anger in his tone, and his words recalled Hope to herself, and smote her with a feeling of pain. What had she been saying? She had spoken as if she were not happy with him! as if she liked other people better. It was not his fault that Cotstone was an out-of-the-way place, when she herself had chosen to come here with him from the first. How wrong she had been all along! How she had wounded her husband; and how much more she must have grieved that still dearer Heavenly Friend and Master by her fretfulness and irritability at what He had appointed for her!

She went to her room, there to confess her sin to Him alone; then descended to the study and knocked rather timidly.

‘Come in.’

Walter looked up as she entered, and read in her face for what she had come.

‘Oh, Walter, I’m so sorry!’

‘All right, dear,’ he answered gently. ‘But what has been the matter, Hope? Have you been so dull? I didn’t know it.’

‘Oh, it was wrong of me. But you know I have been shut up a good deal through the snow, and I wanted something fresh; and then I was vexed because’—she hesitated—‘because you never saw it, or seemed dull yourself, and I wanted you to say you were.’

Walter laughed a little.

‘Of course I didn’t say it, because I’ve not been the least dull. But I ought to have recollected that you were not getting about as I could; and I dare say it is a very different life from what you have been accustomed to.’

‘Oh, do forget that horrid speech, please, Walter, dear!’ Hope exclaimed, tears of distress springing to her eyes. ‘I can’t think how I could say it; and I didn’t mean that I wasn’t happy with you—indeed I didn’t!’

‘No, I thought you could not really mean that; but, Hope, as you found I didn’t see it, why didn’t you tell me you were dull? I dare say we could have managed to get out a little more if I had known.’

‘It was my pride,’ she answered frankly, though looking down and blushing scarlet. ‘I said that if you couldn’t find it out for yourself, I wasn’t going to tell you.’

Her husband smiled again.

‘Ah, Pride is a great enemy! but we mustn’t let him spoil the peace and happiness of our little home, must we, child? However, now I know all about it; and I have been thinking that it was thoughtless of me not to consider how you would like to go to Badgery, and I don’t see why you should not.’

‘Oh no, Walter; I oughtn’t to leave my mothers’ meeting. You were right when you said it would have a bad influence.’

‘No; I think I was unreasonable. It was only sensible what you said, that we have never missed anything since we came here, and therefore we can for once. And I should like you to have this little change; for, now that I look at you, you are grown rather pale, and thinner. So this is what we will do. You shall go to Badgery on Monday, when they send the carriage. I’ll stay for the temperance meeting—because I think it is rather important to be regular with those—and then I’ll walk over on Tuesday, so that I shall see the Wises and the Archdeacon.’

‘Oh, but I wish we could go together! Why shouldn’t I stay till Tuesday, too?’

‘Why should you? Lose a whole day, and not get the carriage! No; my plan is much the best.’

‘But such a great walk for you! Suppose it should be wet?’

‘Well, if it is, or I don’t feel inclined for such a stretch, I need only walk into Duncombe, and go by train to Badgery. So you can write to Lady Alice, and tell her that we have arranged it so, if convenient to them.’

Accordingly, the carriage came from Badgery Court on Monday, and Hope departed, ‘like a grand lady,’ as she said. Walter turned up the next day, and the visit was a very enjoyable one. Both returned, pleased and refreshed, and worked on together, quietly and very happily, till the month of July, when Hope’s labours were interrupted for a short time by the arrival of a little daughter in their home.

Jessie Lester was chosen to be one of the god-mothers, and came to stay at Cotstone for the Christening, where she had the pleasure of the companionship of Arthur Wise. It had been the earnest wish of both Walter and Hope that he should be godfather to their first child; and though somewhat reluctant, from the knowledge that his life might have ended long before his godchild was of age to take her vows upon herself, he could not refuse the request of his two friends, besides the pleasure which it was to him in many ways. He hardly ever left home; but he was determined to be present in person at the Baptism, and Cotstone was so short a distance from Avenham that he could get there with very little difficulty or fatigue. Both he and Jessie much enjoyed their visit, and seeing all that the Fenwicks were doing in the parish. The presence of Arthur, whom she knew so well, and who was also so



intimate with Walter Fenwick, served to put her much more at her ease with the latter than she used to be ; in fact, by the end of her visit she had grown quite to enjoy his society ; and she returned home, having made up her mind that Hope was a model clergyman's wife, and that a life like hers was just what she would delight in.

And, indeed, both Walter and Hope did consider their lot a very happy one. True, there was not a superabundance of money, and economy in everything had to be studied, while the condition of their parish was a grief of mind to them. Still, there were signs that God was working in the place. Here and there, a soul was called 'out of darkness into His marvellous light ;' and, though far from resting satisfied with such results, they did not ignore them, but 'thanked God, and took courage.'

An occasional visit from and to their friends at Badgery and Avenham was always a refreshment to them, while in the next spring they went up to London to stay with Mrs. Fenwick, who had taken a house in town for a few months, and then Hope had the pleasure of revisiting her old scene of labour ; and the baby was an ever-increasing source of interest and delight to them.

## CHAPTER X.

‘Give what thou wilt, and how much thou wilt, and when thou wilt.’—*Imitation of Christ.*

‘ISN’T this a splendid day for our expedition, Walter?’ said Hope, one bright, fresh October morning.

‘Yes, jolly! one feels as merry as a cricket. You’ll be ready by half-past nine? we ought to start then.’

The Fenwicks were going to spend the day at Avenham, and, as they intended to walk into Duncombe and there catch a train, Hope trotted off on household affairs as soon as their eight o’clock breakfast was over. From the kitchen she went out into the village, to see a sick woman; and on her return hastened to the nursery, where the little fifteen-months-old Margaret was playing on the floor, and a baby of seven weeks was just being taken out of its cradle, whom the mother proceeded to wash and dress; then, when this operation was finished, joined her husband in the hall.

‘We ought to go, Hope; you can fasten your neck-cloth as you go along, can’t you?’

‘My “neck-cloth”! what words you do use! Yes; I’m ready to start.’

Their walk to Duncombe was a thoroughly enjoyable one—through the lanes, where the frost of the preceding night was sparkling on the withered bracken and red leaves of the bramble. The air was still and clear, with the delicious, invigorating freshness that belongs to early autumn days, and they walked swiftly along, revelling in the bright atmosphere and beautiful colouring of all around—while the rabbits scuttled across the road before them, and the only sounds were the occasional whirr of a pheasant's wing overhead, or the crack of a gun in the fields.

‘Isn't it lovely!’ Hope remarked, after there had been a silence, broken only by Walter's occasional snatches of song, with which he generally enlivened a walk. ‘Everything is dying all around, we know, and yet one can hardly believe it; it all looks so bright and peaceful and unruffled.’

‘Isn't that what death should be?’ Walter asked. ‘It ought not to take us by surprise, and put us all in a flurry and terror.’

‘No; but when there is great suffering, or the call comes suddenly, there can't be the same still, waiting calm that there is in all these fading leaves.’

‘Perhaps not, outwardly; but I don't know that bodily suffering ought to influence the spirit; I think there should be in *that* perfect brightness and repose. And those who have known before what resting in the Lord, and waiting patiently for Him means, I believe do find great peace and beauty and brightness in Death, although there may be storms raging without.

“Ever the richest, tenderest glow  
Sets round the autumnal sun,”

you know.’

“But there sight fails ; no heart may know  
The bliss when life is done,”

Hope added softly, almost as if to herself.

‘I always think of Arthur, in that verse,’ she observed presently. ‘I suppose he is gradually dying, so to say ; and, certainly, the “glow” round his life seems to get always richer and tenderer.’

‘Yes ; and I’m sure that no one will have any idea what his bliss is, when pain and disappointment are over for him.’

‘What would they all do, though, if he were taken ? —poor Ruth, especially ; she adores him so.’

‘I don’t know,’ Walter replied. ‘We haven’t to arrange now how to bear future trials, I’m thankful to say. God doesn’t give us the grace to lay by in store ; but when the trial comes, He says, “Now, My grace is sufficient for thee.”’

‘Yes, I see,’ Hope responded. ‘It is just the day-by-day and hour-by-hour life that we are called to.’

The Rectory party were all indoors when the Fenwicks arrived at Avenham ; but, later on, when the keenness of the early morning air had departed, Arthur’s couch was placed in a sunny part of the garden, and there most of the party established themselves. In the afternoon, Walter went off with Mr. Wise to see some of his old friends in the parish, while Hope and Ruth sat out with Arthur, and Mrs. Wise was often with them.

After a time Ruth was called in to see visitors, and Arthur and Hope were left alone.

‘I want to ask you a question,’ said the latter, after a moment’s hesitation. ‘I hope you won’t mind; but would you have been without all your trouble and suffering if you could?’

It was a home question—rendered still more so by coming from her lips—and a sort of quivering shade crossed Arthur’s face.

‘Perhaps I ought not to ask you such a thing. Don’t answer it if you would rather not,’ Hope said.

‘I don’t mind,’ he answered, turning towards her. ‘For a long time after my accident—oh! three or four years—if you had asked me this, I should have said, “Oh, anything to be strong and able to work for God!” although I did believe that what He did was best, and I knew it must be right; so I didn’t fret. But what I mean is, that I should have chosen an active life as the far happier one.’

‘But now?’ Hope asked, as he paused; and her tone betrayed anxiety to hear the answer.

‘Now,’ he continued slowly and deliberately, and looking out before him as if hardly speaking to her, ‘I would not change. I have learnt that God can make a life like mine a most blessed one.’

‘You find it worth while to suffer?’ said Hope, after a moment’s silence.

‘Yes—*worth while*; that’s just it! It’s worth while to suffer, if only to be able to sympathize with others; and

then, to "know *Him*, and the fellowship of His sufferings"! Well! that is worth a far longer and greater trial than mine.'

'Oh, Arthur!' Hope exclaimed, 'if it makes you feel so, it must be indeed worth while to be a sufferer! But you said you didn't feel this for the first three or four years. Do you think one must always suffer a long time before one finds out the blessedness of it?'

'I can't say. Very likely it was my own fault that for so long I didn't see all that this life was meant to give me. But I do think that the peace and joy I have now must come gradually. You see, it comes from knowing a *Person*.'

'But you knew the Lord Jesus before,' said Hope.

'Yes—in a measure; but it is like you and Fenwick—if you don't mind my taking you as a simile,' Arthur said, with a smile. 'You know and love each other now; but don't you suppose that if God lets you live on together, each year you will know more, and there will be still more mutual confidence, still more sympathy, still more devotedness, still more love? particularly if you *suffer* together; and I suppose all husbands and wives whose married life lasts any time have some of that. And when you get this beautiful, close union of hearts—although you may have gone through very deep waters to get it—I should think you will say that it was "worth while."'

The dew on Hope's long lashes and the emotion of her countenance showed that he was right.

‘But do you think there can’t be this close union with Christ, which gives such peace and happiness, without much suffering?’ she presently asked.

‘I don’t say that,’ he answered. ‘God teaches all His pupils differently; and some can learn best by prosperity, and some by adversity. But no one can go through a life of any length without some trouble, you know, Hope; although they may be only inner sorrows, which no one else knows anything about. God doesn’t specify the particular kind of “tribulation” through which we must enter into His Kingdom.’

Hope sat musing, and presently Arthur asked:

‘What has put all these thoughts about *suffering* into your mind?’

‘I don’t know exactly,’ she replied, looking up with a smile. ‘I always think a little about it when—when I see you; and as we walked to the station this morning, Walter and I were talking about death, and I suppose that introduced the subject to my mind. You know, life is a very happy and beautiful thing to me; but I have known a little trouble already—and I know more must come,’ she continued steadily; ‘and so I like to hear what anyone who has really gone through a great deal thinks about it.’

‘Well, I hope you may not have much,’ Arthur responded half-sadly. ‘I don’t like to think of clouds coming over your bright spirit.’

‘Over my spirit! they oughtn’t to touch that, ought they?’ Hope answered, smiling.

‘No,’ he replied quickly. ‘We can thank God that

*nothing* outward can touch our "life," which is "hid with Christ in God."'

At this moment Mr. Wise and Walter returned, and the conversation was at an end; but Hope thought often of it, even although no cloud was visible on her horizon. Those which had existed, in the way of parochial troubles, seemed to be passing away; for in time there were signs of improvement in the Cotstone people, not unmarked by those who were waiting for the precious fruit of the earth there; and the merciful ignorance of coming events, in which we are all enveloped, hid the future from her eyes, and left her happy in the present.



CHAPTER XI.

‘Who, but a Christian, through all life  
That blessing may prolong?  
Who, through the world’s sad day of strife,  
Still chant his morning song?’

*Christian Year.*

‘WHERE is father?’ said Hope to her little Maggie, now nearly three-and-a-half, one morning when they had come into the dining-room for prayers, and Walter had not appeared. ‘Go to the study, darling, and call him. Perhaps he didn’t notice the bell.’

Maggie was scampering off, when her father appeared. His expression was grave and troubled, and he did not seem to notice his little girl, till roused by her lisping ‘Dood mornin’, father.’

Then he raised her in his arms and kissed her fondly, but the sigh with which he set her down again struck with a kind of foreboding fear on the ear of his wife, already startled by his unusual appearance and manner. However, there was no time to say anything then; the servants entered, Maggie took her place on her mother’s knee, and the simple, earnest family worship was gone through.

Prayers over, Hope took her little girl back to the nursery and returned to the dining-room, where she found her husband standing over the fire, leaning his head on his hand; but he looked up as she came in.

‘Walter, something has happened, hasn’t it? What has gone wrong?’ she asked gently.

‘Yes; a very unexpected and serious blow has come upon us, Hope. I have had a letter from mamma this morning. Her bank has failed utterly, and she has lost everything.’

Hope stood for a minute looking at him in dumb consternation.

‘Walter!’ she exclaimed at last, ‘how dreadful! But couldn’t it have been helped? Didn’t she know things were going wrong?’

‘It seems not. I’m afraid the men she has trusted to manage the affairs of it for her have either been dishonest, or perhaps only rash. But anyhow, the crash has come suddenly upon her, and she is left without a penny.’

‘Oh dear! it is too dreadful! Poor mamma! What will she do?’

‘She wants me to go and help her. I have looked out the trains, and I can catch one which will get me to Storr to-night.’

‘Oh yes, of course she will want you. But I don’t see, Walter, that this is a blow upon us exactly.’

‘Some of my money was in the bank,’ he an-

swered. 'It will reduce our income by about sixty pounds——'

'Oh, Walter!'

'And besides, Hope, if I find that it really is as mamma says, that she has lost every farthing—and I'm afraid it must be so—we must give them a home here.'

Hope's countenance fell considerably.

'How can we—with our small income reduced and the children to provide for?'

'I know that, dear; but God has sent this trial upon us, and if it brings duties, too, we mustn't shrink from them. Surely you won't grudge poor mamma and the youngsters a shelter here! Who else is to give it them, if we don't?' Walter asked, in a tone of some surprise and disappointment.

'No, no!' Hope replied quickly. 'I'm so sorry I made any objection; it was very nasty and selfish of me. But do you think that she really will not have the means even to provide a home for herself?'

'I expect not. You know, these terrible bank failures do leave people absolutely penniless; and, of course, it would come more heavily on her than on anyone else.'

'What an awful blow it must be to her! Always accustomed to have everything she could wish, and suddenly reduced to beggary!'

'Yes; she writes like one evidently completely crushed, and I very much fear that she has not laid

up treasure in heaven. Oh, Hope, it is a blessed thing, "among the sundry and manifold changes of the world," to have our hearts "surely fixed"—*there!*" Walter said, glancing upward.

'Yes,' was her earnest reply, 'and we can cast all this care upon God; for it is a very serious blow, as you said.'

'It is—and we had better understand that at once. Do you know, little wife, what we shall now have to face?'

'Poverty?' she said, half-inquiringly, as she looked steadily at him.

'Yes,' he answered. 'We shall now be really poor. I don't care a pin for myself, but I do dread the thought of seeing you and the children want anything. We have not been rich, but you have always had everything necessary, and now we may not always be able to have that.'

Hope looked rather anxious. She did not care for herself, but her mother's heart thought with pain of her little ones being deprived of the comforts they had hitherto enjoyed. But in a moment her trustful heart turned to its never-failing Stay and Support, and she said brightly:

'We won't think of that, Walter dear. Our "Heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things." But I don't think you are getting on properly with your breakfast, and you must, when you are going on this great journey.'

Walter brightened up, and after breakfast they were

all in a bustle getting him off. It was soon over though, and he was gone, and Hope was left to think quietly as she went about her work.

It was, truly, a serious prospect for the Fenwicks; for, two months before, a twin boy and girl had been added to their family, and the increasing number of little ones occasioned a corresponding increase of expenditure. Hope's bright face looked unusually grave, yet not troubled, as she sat down to write letters. The Lesters were away, so she could not hope to see them; but she wrote to Mrs. Wise, thinking that some of them might come over to have a talk.

She was not disappointed. The day following Mr. Wise rode over, and was welcomed most gladly.

'I thought I would come and see you, and tell you in person how very sorry we all are about this,' he said.

'I knew you would be; but it's very good of you to come over,' Hope answered gratefully. 'I hoped perhaps you might.'

'I'm very glad I have, then. But it is really a very serious matter for you, isn't it?'

'It is indeed,' she replied. 'Walter wouldn't get to Storr in time for the post last night, so I can't hear from him for a day or two; but I don't suppose there is really much to hear. He says mamma *must* be utterly ruined, and he supposes everything will be sold; so we may look upon it as a settled thing that they will come here.'

‘You think Mrs. Fenwick will agree to do so?’

‘What else can she do? I suppose there would be nothing else but the workhouse.’

‘Poor thing!’ Mr. Wise said compassionately. ‘This is a proof, if one were needed, that riches certainly “make themselves wings.” What an addition it will be to your household! The boys are not grown up yet, are they?’

‘Oh no. Lionel is only sixteen, and Bernard nearly two years younger. I have been thinking that there is their education to be finished—they are both at Eton now—and I suppose we shall have to see what we can do about that.’

‘That will be a demand upon your funds.’

‘It will all be a great demand. We must make up our minds to be poor now,’ Hope said, looking as if she thought it rather a joke.

‘And you are not afraid of the prospect?’

‘No; why should I be?’ she replied, with a bright smile. ‘And I don’t try looking at the prospect. Don’t you think the happiest thing to do is to

“‘Live for to-day! To-morrow’s light  
To-morrow’s cares shall bring to sight”?’

Mr. Wise looked down kindly, and with a certain admiration as well, on the brave young face upturned to him.

‘You have learnt the secret of true peace, my child,’ he said; ‘and I thank God for it.’

‘Ah, it is so comparatively easy to leave everything in God’s hands, when a great trial like this comes,’ she answered. ‘Where one fails is in giving up one’s will to Him in the *little* temptations and trials of daily life ; at least, I find them the hardest.

‘They are the things that are the real test,’ the clergyman said. ‘But if we go on asking and desiring more entire yielding to God, we shall at last be His altogether, in small and great things.’

‘Oh, I hope and believe so!’ Hope replied. ‘And what I do know already of consecration to God only makes me long to know more.’

‘Then, probably, this change in your life is sent to give you the knowledge you wish for.’

And, as Mr. Wise said this, Hope thought of her conversation with Arthur two years before on the blessedness of trial.

Walter was away a considerable time, for there was much to do; and the blow had so completely prostrated Mrs. Fenwick, that she was almost incapable of attending to business, and entrusted him with nearly the entire management of everything. For the first few days he said nothing about her future prospects; for the mere fact that she had lost everything, and that the whole of her property must be sold, left no room in her mind for anything else. But one day, when a piteous lament over the approaching sale had given him an opening, he introduced the subject.

‘Have you thought at all where you will go after the sale, mamma?’

‘No; I have nowhere to go. I wish I was in my grave—I know that.’

‘Don’t say that. Well, if you haven’t thought of anything, Hope and I have a plan. We want you to come to us.’

‘My dear Walter, what an idea! Why, you have lost a lot of money yourself!’

‘I know that—but not all. We have still a home, and you must make it yours.’

‘I couldn’t, dear boy. It’s very, very kind and good of you; but I can’t add to your burdens in that way; I’m afraid you will have enough now, as it is.’

‘But, mamma, where will you go, then?’

‘Into the workhouse, I suppose. Oh dear! to think that such a thing should have come upon me!’ and Mrs. Fenwick’s tears flowed fast.

Walter’s energetic, rather brusque nature had not much patience with this sort of thing; but he was too chivalrous to behave unfeelingly towards any woman in distress.

‘Now, don’t talk like that,’ he said, gently but cheerfully. ‘None of you shall go into the workhouse as long as I can help it. I know you have no one else to go to, and so Hope and I decided from the first that our little house was open to you. There is room for you; and, please God, there will be other provision, too.’

‘But, Walter, think! I haven’t a penny, you know. I shan’t even have the money to clothe myself and the children—much less be able to repay you.’



‘I have thought all that over, mamma; but we don’t want any payment from you, and I dare say we shall be able to manage to educate the boys somehow. Please come to us! we shall be really disappointed if you don’t.’

‘You are dear, good children—both you and Hope,’ said Mrs. Fenwick tearfully; ‘but I don’t like doing it, dear Walter. I have no real claim upon you, that you should provide for me and my children in this way.’

A sort of gentle shade came over Walter’s face.

‘I think you have a claim upon me, mamma,’ he answered. ‘I owe all my advantages of education to you, besides numerous other kind helps; and I have never yet been able to return you anything for it. Your own boys are not old enough yet to support you; so let me do what is the right of the eldest son. It is from gratitude—and also for the sake of my dear father,’ he added.

‘Oh! what would he say if he saw me and his children in a workhouse!’ sobbed the widow. ‘Dear Walter, I see I can’t do anything else, so I will come to you; I shall like that better than any other home.’

‘I am very glad,’ Walter said heartily. ‘But you know, don’t you, that we can’t have your maid, I’m afraid? I couldn’t afford to pay her wages, though I wish you had not to part with her.’

Mrs. Fenwick looked rather blank.

‘I never realized yet that I should have to do without a maid,’ she said. ‘I shall miss Baker dreadfully; but, of course, I don’t ask you to have her. Thank

you so much, my dear boy, for all you are doing for me.'

That evening, Mrs. Fenwick told Ursula of Walter's proposal that they should go to Cotstone.

'Oh well, that's kind, 'certainly,' she remarked; 'though, really, I don't see what else he could do. He couldn't let us go into the "house;" and, of course, it's cheaper for us to live with him, than for him to provide a separate abode for us.'

'Ursula! how coolly you take it! There is no obligation on him to provide for us; he does it simply out of his great kindness.'

'Well, I said he was kind. But I say it's rather a slow prospect, being mewed up in that little out-of-the-way place. Oh! it's a stag-hunting neighbourhood, though; I dare say I may get some fun out of that.'

'What are you talking about? You must give up all idea of hunting, or anything of that sort. Walter is a poor man, and it will be a great struggle just to feed and clothe us, I'm afraid.'

'If I'm to have no fun, then I shall very soon cut and run. I shall disguise myself as a boy, and go off to the bush.'

'Ursula, I wish you wouldn't talk in this way!' said Mrs. Fenwick, beginning to cry. 'I can't stand such things; and it's very unkind of you not to think how I'm shaken and upset.'

Ursula looked rather abashed; but she did not understand making a gracious apology.

'I'm sorry,' she said abruptly. 'But I'm sure to

find it awfully slow, and I *must* cut out some amusement for myself.'

'Well, only take care that your amusements do not cost Walter anything,' said her mother. 'And, indeed, Ursula dear, I don't think you ought to live on him; I think you ought to go as a governess.'

Mrs. Fenwick proposed this timidly, almost certain that it would be objected to; and she was right.

'I—a governess!' exclaimed the girl scornfully. 'I'd like to see myself! Besides, it's an impossibility; I don't know a note of music, and I've forgotten all my French by this time. No; if I can be kept, I don't see why I should keep myself.'

'Oh, Ursula, you are very selfish!' sighed her mother.

'So are most people,' was the blunt rejoinder, which left Mrs. Fenwick in tears.

It was a month before the move to Cotstone took place, and all that time Walter was away; for his step-mother leant so completely on him that he could not think of leaving her. The providing for his Sunday duty in his parish might have been rather a serious consideration for him, had it not been for the kindness of the neighbouring clergy, who undertook to divide it among themselves, and would not hear of receiving any remuneration; and Mr. Wise himself came over for one Sunday. When the sale of Storr House came on, Mrs. Fenwick and her children went to their Rector's house, as Walter was obliged to stay to the end, and his step-mother could not undertake the journey without him.

But at last it was all over ; and the house which had been her home all her life was left for ever. Mrs. Fenwick was in a tearful, wailing condition the whole of the journey—caused partly by the shock to her feelings on finding that she had to travel in a second-class carriage ; and the four miles drive from Duncombe, through the dark lanes, did not tend to cheer her. However, they reached Cotstone at last, and as soon as the fly stopped at the Vicarage, the door was opened, and the bright light that streamed out showed Hope standing on the step.

Walter and his brothers were the first to appear ; but while the latter turned to her for greeting, her husband seemed not to have noticed her, and was intent on helping out Ursula and her mother. Hope restrained the strong inclination to fly at Walter and hug him, which the first sight of his face and sound of his voice gave her, after their long separation—the first since their marriage—and greeted her sister-in-law, as the girl appeared.

‘ Well, Ursula, how are you ? Very cold, I’m afraid.’

‘ Somewhat ; more cramped than anything. How do you do, Hope ? You look rather comfortable in there.’ And she marched into the house.

Hope could not conceal a smile at her odd manner ; but Lionel took a different view of it, and muttered :

‘ Selfish pig !’

But now Mrs. Fenwick was out of the carriage, and Walter led her in.

‘ Here’s Hope, mamma.’ And his smile of affection,

as for one moment he held his young wife's hand, told her that she was not overlooked by him.

'Oh, my dear, don't come out into this bitter cold! I thought we should never get here, but we have at last. It seemed a dreadfully dark, dreary road; but I suppose it is because everything is dreary to me now. Oh dear! oh dear!' and Mrs. Fenwick began to sob.

'I hope you think we're a cheerful party,' Ursula scornfully remarked to Hope, as the latter conducted her mother-in-law to the drawing-room; but an indignant glance of the brown eyes was the only answer she got.

'Here, mamma dear, sit down by the fire,' said Hope, guiding Mrs. Fenwick to an armchair. 'You have had such a long journey, and are very cold and tired, I know.'

'Oh, it's been a terrible day! I feel as if I had no strength left for anything. But I really haven't spoken to you yet, dear Hope. How are you? You look very sweet. But, oh! my dear, I wish we were not come to you in this way!—as paupers, to live on your charity!' and the tears burst forth afresh.

'Don't talk about that now, mamma,' Hope responded soothingly. 'We are so glad to have you, and I do hope you will all be happy with us. I haven't had tea, for I thought it would be best to combine that with supper, as it is getting late. I hope you will soon be able to go up to your room; they are taking up the luggage now.'

Hope wished Ursula would go and help with the

luggage; but she had thrown off her hat and established herself in another chair, from whence she looked on with rather a scornful air at Hope's coaxing attempts to comfort her mother.

At this moment, Lionel put in his head.

'I say, Ursa, just come along and make yourself of some use, can't you? There are lots of things that you might take up.'

'Why can't the servants do that?' she asked, without moving.

'We have only one servant,' Hope answered quietly, 'and I know she would like to go and see after the supper. If you would help, Ursula, we should be very glad.'

The girl opened her eyes at the announcement that there was only one servant; but she rose, with a 'Whew!' and went out.

When the luggage had been taken upstairs, Hope conducted Mrs. Fenwick to her room, and having taken off her things, left her to lie on the sofa till supper was ready, while she went to visit Ursula in her room.

'This is not a very large apartment, but I think it will accommodate you,' she said.

'Oh yes, thank you,' Ursula replied shortly.

'I'm glad your fire is burning brightly; but I'm afraid we can't give it you again. It will seem dreadfully uncomfortable; but I thought I had better tell you at once.'

'What can't be cured must be endured, of course.'

‘Yes ; and we do hope you will be happy with us, although you will find the life very different.’

‘Suppose so.’

As Ursula was evidently not disposed to talk, Hope left her, and went downstairs, at the foot of which she met Walter. She sprang towards him, and he put his arm round her and kissed her fondly.

‘I’ve hardly seen you yet, you dear old boy!’

‘No ; I’ve been wanting a kiss—I didn’t feel as if I had really come home. How are you, dear?’

‘Very well. You look tired ; you have had a hard month of it. Oh, I’m so glad to have you back again!’

‘Not more glad, I expect, than I to come back,’ he answered, stroking his wife’s hair with a smile. ‘I haven’t seen the children yet ; and I want to hear all about the parish. You will have to give me your report, as Curate-in-charge.’

But there was no time for a talk till all the new arrivals had gone to bed, and Walter and Hope lingered over the drawing-room fire. The December night was cold, and they were reluctant to leave the warmth below. Walter asked many questions about Cotstone matters, and his wife’s replies showed that she had done her utmost to supply his place in his absence. Then they stood in silence for a little time, till Hope said :

‘And so now we really start on this new life!’

‘Yes. It has been a trying time at Storr.’

‘It must have been. It’s quite sad to think of all

those beautiful things being gone. I can hardly believe it, when I think of the happy time we had there, only this last summer.'

'No, it is a change. Poor mamma is sadly broken down.'

'She is indeed. And, Walter, Ursula is so selfish!'

'She really is a *nasty* girl!' he answered. 'Mamma wanted her to go as a governess, but she quite refused, it seems; and, of course, I can't make her, though I think she might.'

'Yes—it would be one off our hands; however, I suppose it is best she should be here. I hope I shan't quarrel with her. She seems rather grumpy at the state of things; but the boys are very nice.'

'Oh, they are good fellows; but they will find it a new way of life.'

'Yes. Look here, though, what I have to give you!—and Hope put into her husband's hand two five-pound notes.

'What on earth is this?' he asked, in amazement.

'My earnings, sir,' Hope merrily replied.

'Your earnings! do explain yourself.'

'Well, you remember, when we were at Badgery, nearly a year ago, that funny old Mr. Hardwicke we met there? He admired my sketch of the interior of Avenham Church so much, that he said he would give me ten pounds if I liked to do him a large finished picture from it. I didn't care to, then; but I thought now that this was a good time to get ten pounds: so I



set to work and did it, and he sent me the money yesterday.'

Walter looked at the notes for a moment, and something or other made him clear his throat, and give a sort of flick to one eye; then he took both Hope's hands in his, saying earnestly:

'My good little wife, I do thank you and my God for this.'

She was silent with pleasure; but presently she said:

'I know you are very tired, dear, and you ought to go to bed. We must do the rest of our talking at some other time.'

'Jane has got a place, hasn't she? I'm so sorry I couldn't see her,' Walter said.

'Oh, she was so unhappy at going, and at not seeing you! but I gave her the books, as I told you when I wrote. I hope Hannah won't find the work too hard. She is so good-tempered, and I should be very sorry to lose her.'

'We must try and not do that. I hope Ursula will be willing to make herself useful, but I rather doubt it. However, we'll trust that all will be arranged right for us.'

'Yes; and I think we can say, can't we, Walter? that we have sought "first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and so all needful things *shall* be added unto us.'

'We have His own word for it,' Walter replied; 'and, resting on that, I suppose we had better go to bed.'

As they were leaving the room, he asked, in a hurried tone :

‘Jock is gone, Hope?’

‘Yes,’ she answered sorrowfully. ‘Mr. Fielding’s groom came for him two days ago. I said they must take him away before you came back.’

Walter sighed, and then asked :

‘Did you see Mr. Fielding?’

‘Oh yes, when he came to see Jock. He is evidently very fond of dogs, and knows just the way to talk to them. Jockie did not much like him then, of course ; but I think he will soon get to know him.’

‘I’m glad he is gone a long way off,’ was all Walter said, as he went into his dressing-room ; and his wife knew that, still less than she, could he have borne to meet in that neighbourhood the dog who had been his friend for many years, and from whom he had now been obliged to part. Hope herself had shed many tears the day poor Jock was taken away, and he had been driven off in the gig sent for him, whining, and with his wistful brown eyes fixed on his mistress to the last. He would not have gone, had it not been for her whispered words that Walter said he was to go. She loved the dog for his own sake ; and, also, he was always associated in her mind with her first recollections of her husband, for the one was hardly ever seen without the other at Avenham.

‘I suppose you will be mamma’s maid now?’ Hope observed pleasantly to Ursula, after breakfast the next morning. Mrs. Fenwick was not up yet.

‘I? No! I never thought of such a thing!’ replied Ursula, in astonishment.

‘Didn’t you? I supposed you would have arranged all that. She can’t do everything for herself, when she has never been accustomed to it, and I thought you would know all her ways.’

‘Not I! And I couldn’t do her hair, or anything of that sort; I should half kill her, I expect. You’d be much better at that sort of thing, with those dainty little hands,’ said Ursula, in a sneering tone.

‘Much obliged for the compliment to my hands. If it hadn’t been coupled with such a very broad hint to take the work you ought to do upon myself, it would have been more gratifying,’ Hope replied, an indignant flush mounting to her forehead, and feeling a secret but not exactly commendable pleasure in showing Ursula that she had some spirit. It was not the sort of spirit after which she professed to strive, though.

Ursula looked at her sister-in-law with a peculiar and unpleasant smile during her speech, but did not seem the least ruffled or abashed by it—only saying coolly, after a moment:

‘You haven’t quite tamed the “unruly member” yet, have you?’

‘Now I shall see Hope properly sorry and abasing herself in sackcloth and ashes,’ she said to herself. ‘I thought I could make her do something which would show her that she isn’t quite such a saint as Walter thinks her, and has probably made her believe herself.’

During this soliloquy, Hope's colour had again risen ; but this time from feelings of repentance and shame, which were visible in her downcast eye and stifled voice, as she replied to Ursula :

‘ No, I haven’t.’

She seemed to wish to stop there ; but after a moment of looking into the fire, her colour growing still deeper, with difficulty she brought out the words :

‘ I am sorry for what I said to you.’

Ursula hardly seemed to attend, and presently inquired :

‘ Well, what are you going to do about mamma ? I can tell you, you might as well turn a bull into a china-shop as me into a smart bedroom, to fiddle-faddle over silk gowns and lace caps and all that nonsense.’

Hope could not trust herself to reply ; she only made a sound, meant to imply that it did not matter, and, hearing Mrs. Fenwick’s bell, went upstairs—the chief thought in her mind being, that the first time Ursula provoked her, she had yielded to her sinful desire to give tit for tat and say something sharp in return.

‘ It’s very plain how she will notice one’s failings,’ said Hope to herself. ‘ There’s a great deal of “cuteness” about her, and it’s rather unsparing, too. But I don’t want to be spared ; I’m glad she didn’t, just now. I dare say to live with her is just the discipline I need.’

‘ Oh, Hope dear ! good-morning,’ said Mrs. Fenwick,

when her daughter-in-law entered the room. 'I rang to know if your maid could do my hair for me? I really can't manage it myself.'

'Hannah is very busy,' Hope answered, 'and, besides, she knows nothing about hair-dressing, I'm afraid; but let me do it for you, mamma.'

'Oh, my dear, no! I can't bother you with it. Stay! Ursula ought to do it for me now. Send her, will you? though I'm afraid she will never manage to do it decently.'

'You had better let me be your maid,' Hope said, smiling. 'I've come up to dress you; and if you wouldn't mind letting me begin on your hair at once, I shall be able to go after my other work sooner.'

Mrs. Fenwick yielded to her persuasive manner, and seated herself before the dressing-table.

'We don't look so gloomy this morning, do we?' Hope remarked. 'I'm so glad it's a bright day; the hoar-frost is glittering beautifully.'

'Yes, it's a pretty look-out; but everything seems dreary to me. I'm afraid you will find me a very wretched, sorrowful old woman, my dear; but I can't help it, it is such a change to me.'

'I know it must be; I do feel so much for you,' Hope answered, gently touching the soft, silvery locks. 'But isn't it a comfort, dear mamma, to remember that there is One Who can never change?'

'Yes,' Mrs. Fenwick answered; but her tone implied that the thought brought no real comfort to her heart.

‘Have you really only one servant, Hope? How do you manage?’ she asked presently.

‘Oh, I hope we shall do all right. I am nurse and cook too, if I’m wanted. I dare say you won’t mind my sending Maggie and Milford to you sometimes, when I am busy?’

‘I shall like it. They may always come to their granny.’

‘And I dare say Ursula will be good enough to help me with them—taking them out walking, and so on.’

‘She ought to; but she can’t bear children. She must help you, though. I’m afraid you will find her a great trouble, my dear.’

‘I hope not. I dare say we shall manage to get on all right; and the boys will do all they can, I am sure.’

‘Oh yes, they will. By-the-bye, what are you going to do with them, Hope?’

‘I don’t know exactly. I think Walter wants to talk to you and them about it. Now, will you come down to the dining-room?’

They found Ursula and her brothers there. Walter had gone out into the village. Hope settled Mrs. Fenwick in the armchair by the fire, and was leaving the room, when Bernard called after her:

‘Isn’t there anything we can do to help you, Hope?’

‘Thank you. Yes, you can—if you won’t mind rough work; that’s all I have to give you. Hannah

wants coal and wood bringing in, I know, and she will be very glad if you would do it for her.'

'Where do coal and wood live?'

'Go into the kitchen, and she will show you. The wood may want chopping. Shall you be inclined to do that?'

'Of course! Rare work for warming one. Come on, Bernard!'

'Oh, my dear boys, do take care!' said Mrs. Fenwick nervously. 'Bernard, don't be lifting heavy things.'

'No, no, mamma; we'll do all right.'

The boys came in to dinner bright and glowing, and with great appetites, which Walter had also brought back, after having been out all the morning. Hope and Hannah had taken the twins for an airing before dinner, and, as soon as the meal was over, the former invited Ursula to join her and the two elder children in their walk. She complied; and, though not saying much, nor that in the pleasantest tone, she did not disguise her admiration and delight at the great hills all round, and seemed interested as Hope told her the names of them.

'She is fond of natural things and of animals,' Hope said to herself. 'There must be a soft corner in her heart, then—if we can only get at it! But I wish she would offer to be of use of her own accord; it would make it so much pleasanter than asking her.'

Poor Hope was beginning to see that these new inmates of her home would be a serious tax upon her

time and strength, as well as upon their funds ; and as they began to settle down, she found that this was the case. A family conclave had been held on the subject of the two boys' education, and it had been decided that Bernard should go to a grammar-school in a town not very far from Avenham ; for any more expensive education it was quite out of Walter's power to provide. It was as much as he could do to send one to this school ; and, Bernard being the youngest, it was considered more necessary for him still to have a regular education. Lionel, who was sixteen, and well advanced for his age, was to continue his studies with his elder brother at Cotstone. Mrs. Fenwick shed floods of tears at the change in her boys' prospects ; but it was the best that could be done, and she was grateful to Walter for doing as much. Bernard, who was rather delicate and fastidious, did not much relish the idea of a grammar-school after Eton life ; but Lionel rallied him on this, and he determined to put a good face on the matter. His brother rather liked the prospect of Cotstone life, and Hope was not sorry to have him there ; for he was a strong, active lad, fond of her, and anxious to be useful.



## CHAPTER XII.

‘Look upon yourself as a hired servant of God, to whom He has promised a rich reward at the end of the day He calls *life* : each morning hold yourself in readiness to obey all His commands, in the way He wills, and with the means He appoints.’—*Gold Dust*.

THE twins were asleep in their cradle in the nursery, and by the window sat their mother in the low rocking-chair, stitching busily in the twilight ; for the lengthening of the days at the end of March enabled them to dispense with lights for a longer time. The room was very quiet—nothing to be heard but the click of Hope’s needle and the wind rustling the ivy-leaves on the wall outside. Presently the door was gently opened, and a tall figure in a riding-habit appeared.

‘Hope, may I come in?’

‘Why, Ada!’ and Hope sprang up to meet her visitor. ‘What on earth brings you here?’

‘Didn’t you know I was staying at Franklyn’s? No, I don’t know why you should, though. However, I am ; and, as we were passing, I ran in to see you.’

‘But how will you get back?—it’s getting late ; and where are your friends?’

'Kate and Harry are gone on, and Guy is waiting for me.'

'And you are going to ride home together in the gloaming? How very improper!'

'Shocking, isn't it?' Ada replied, with a mock deprecatory air. 'It was Kate's own suggestion, and I'm sure Guy and I are both as innocent as new-born babes. It's rather hard if young people may never enjoy themselves together in a natural way.'

Hope smiled, and said: 'You needn't be afraid I am going to report you to your parents. How did you find out I was up here?'

'Walter told me you were. Oh! now I have actually been and gone and done it!' exclaimed Ada, in great consternation at having used the Christian name. 'I beg your pardon, Hope; I really didn't mean to.'

Hope had gone into a fit of laughter.

'It shows what you are in the habit of calling him, and your sin has found you out at last!' she said merrily. 'Walter will be entertained when I tell him.'

'Oh, for goodness' sake, Hope, don't do that!' poor Ada exclaimed. 'You really *must not*! Promise me you won't, there's a good creature, or I shall be miserable henceforth.'

'Why, one would think you were as modest and shamefaced as Jessie, instead of the thick-skinned animal that you are! You wouldn't care if he did know,' Hope replied, looking very mischievous.

'Yes, I should; he would think it so dreadfully pert of me. Will you promise, Hope, not to tell him?'

'All right,' she answered, laughing. 'He wouldn't think it very dreadful, though.'

'You mustn't tell him, all the same,' said Ada, shaking her head solemnly. 'And now, let's sit down and be quiet; for, to tell the truth, I came here to be rational, for we don't do much but giggle all day at Franklyns.'

'And you don't find that occupation altogether satisfactory?' Hope said, with a slight smile, as she resumed her needle.

'Oh, well, I like it, you know; that's just the thing.'

Hope smiled again, but did not speak.

'What are you thinking of, Hope?' asked Ada, after watching her for a minute or two.

'Of you,' was the answer.

'I dare say; what about me?'

'You don't think you ought to laugh as much as you do?'

'No, I don't mean that, and I don't believe you really think I do. Of course, one knows there's nothing wrong in laughing; and, moreover, I don't believe I could help it, if I was to be hanged for it! but then it doesn't do to laugh at things that ought not to be laughed at.'

'No. What do you want me to say to you, Ada?'

'Nothing particular. I only came here because I knew you wouldn't be like the Leighs, and you would probably say something or other that would be beneficial to me. I want now to know how you are getting

on. And really, Hope, you can't see to work any longer, I'm sure.'

'No; I'm afraid I must have a light,' Hope answered, looking out at the increasing darkness. 'Will you light a candle, Ada?'

Ada rose and lit the two candles on the chimney-piece.

'Oh! not both, dear! put one out, please.'

'You can't see with only one candle,' Ada said, in an expostulating tone.

'Yes, I can, if you will put it on the table. You don't know what it is to have to be careful of every candle you burn.'

'No; and I wish you didn't, either,' Ada replied, rather sadly.

'Oh, the worst is over, now that winter, I hope, is gone; and, as the spring weather comes on, I hope mamma will get stronger.'

'Has Mrs. Fenwick been ill? We didn't know.'

'No; it was not worth mentioning in a letter, and I have not seen any of you for a long time. She caught a dreadful cold—I suppose from the atmosphere of the house being so different from what she has been accustomed to. She was laid up for a month, and had to have the doctor.'

'She must have been bad, then.'

'Well, I believe I could quite have done all that was wanted; but she was so dreadfully frightened and nervous, and wanted the doctor so much, that we had him to satisfy her.'

‘Well, I really think she might have denied herself on that point!’

‘No, no! she didn’t mean to be selfish!’ cried Hope; ‘but she isn’t strong, and she has always been accustomed to send for the doctor if her little finger ached, and it is very difficult for her to remember how changed things are now, and to get out of her old ways. I don’t want to complain of her at all. She is so kind, and tries so hard to help us, and when she does go into some extravagance, or give trouble, it’s only because she forgets.’

‘Well!’ Ada said emphatically, ‘I do wonder you can be as bright as you are. Why, when I came in, you were as jolly, and chaffing me, and all that kind of thing, as if you had no more cares than I have.’

‘Why, it seems to me the most natural thing to do!’ Hope answered. ‘If there is a good deal of “toiling and moiling” in my life, I am all the more pleased when any little diversion of my thoughts comes. It seems to me that it would be a most extraordinary thing to say that I must be always thinking about my cares, and never be able to enjoy anything because of a skeleton in the cupboard!’

‘Well, you are a very sensible person, Hope—that’s all I can say.’

‘I think it’s more than being sensible that makes me think this. It would be wrong, as well as silly, to be always in the blues. You know, I think the secret for anyone of getting happily through life is just to take *everything* as coming direct from God.’

‘Yes,’ said Ada; but in a tone as if she did not exactly see what this had to do with the point in question.

Hope went on :

‘I mean not only all the troubles—the nasty little stupid worries and all the tiny bits of common work as appointed by Him, but also all the pleasures. He does send them; why should we refuse them because He sends crosses as well?’

‘Then you think you would be refusing a gift from God if you didn’t laugh when you have the chance?’

‘Certainly. I’m sure He sends me these little breaks in my routine of work—like your coming in now, when I was all alone—just to “hearten one up a bit,” as the old women say.’

‘But, you see, my life consists mostly of pleasure,’ Ada replied, looking up, with an arch twinkle in her eye. ‘I don’t need these little breaks which are so good for you. Now, wouldn’t it be better if I didn’t indulge in fun so much?’

‘I am sure you must have been reading Ecclesiastes, and have accepted what Solomon says, that “sorrow is better than laughter,” and “by a sad countenance the heart is made better,”’ said Hope, laughing. ‘But, seriously, Ada, there can be nothing wrong in enjoying the pleasures which God puts in your life. Solomon’s mistake was that he sought happiness in earthly things alone, and of course they ended in bitterness and disappointment; but if you remember, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, to do all to the glory of God,

you will find, I think, that amusement and pleasure take their proper place, and are a help instead of a hindrance. Don't think that God is better pleased with you when you are not merry; only pray and be careful that your merriment is never of a kind of which He would not approve.'

'Ah!' said Ada; and then she sat thinking for some moments, tracing patterns on the floor with her riding-whip, while Hope worked on in silence, till her young visitor rose rather abruptly, exclaiming, 'How dark it is getting! poor Guy will be in despair; I must be off at once.'

'Yes, indeed! I had forgotten all about your esquire waiting for you. We'll go down, and Walter will go out to find him.'

'No; don't bother Mr. Fenwick.'

'I thought you had another name for him?' Hope observed maliciously.

'Be quiet, Hope! you are a nasty woman. I say, though,' Ada added, in a graver tone, 'I told you you would probably say something to do me good while I was here, and so you have. I like to hear principles applied to just the actual details of life that ordinary folk have to do with.'

Hope smiled, and repeated, half to herself:

'Little things  
On little wings,  
Bear little souls to heaven.'

Walter was sent out, and, having discovered Ada's 'young man'—as Hope insisted on calling him in

order to tease her—outside the Vicarage gate, they departed.

‘Some “little things” seem, at first sight, as if by little *strings* they would drag poor little souls down to earth!’ said Hope, half-laughing, to herself, on entering the house the next afternoon, after a very pleasant walk through the parish with Lionel, and hearing Hannah’s voice, in tones of indignation, proceeding from the landing at the top of the stairs. ‘What is the matter with Hannah?’ she exclaimed aloud.

‘A shindy of some kind, evidently,’ Lionel responded; and his sister-in-law went upstairs.

At the top stood Hannah and Ursula, engaged in angry altercation, and the contents of a paste-pot lying on the floor between them.

‘I ain’t going to do it, I can tell you—that I ain’t! There I was, stopped in the middle of my washing to make that nasty stuff for you; and now you go and upset it, and expect me to clean it up for you, and spend a lot more time washing the carpet! Not I! You may clean it up for yourself as you best can, and pay master for a new bit of carpet into the bargain. I’ve other things to do besides waiting on you and your messes.’

‘I’ll not put up with this sort of thing!’ was Ursula’s angry reply. ‘The idea of your speaking to me in this way! I shall certainly tell Mrs. Fenwick.’

‘You’re quite welcome to do that!’ answered Hannah, with a toss of her head. ‘She’ll not attend to your stories. I’ve served her faithfully this five year



nearly, while you've done nothing but plague the life out of her since you came into the house ; and no one but an angel like her would have stood it. But you're not my mistress, and I'm not going to be your slave—so there !'

'Will you be quiet and do as I tell you ?' demanded Ursula, when she perceived Hope coming upstairs, and at once turned to her. 'Hope, have you heard the way Hannah has been speaking to me ? Will you just order her out of the house ?'

'Ah, very likely !' observed Hannah, with a sneer.

But Hope did not answer Ursula ; she had turned to her maid, saying quietly :

'What is the matter, Hannah ? Remember you are speaking to Miss Fenwick.'

'I don't care if she's Miss Fenwick or not ! I'm not——'

'Hush !' said Hope, stopping her ; 'this is not the way to speak. What is all this mess on the floor, Ursula ?'

'Mess ? yes !' burst out Hannah again ; but Hope silenced her with a gesture, and Ursula began hotly :

'It's some paste I was carrying from my room, where I had been using it. The pot slipped out of my hands, and now, when I call Hannah to clean it up, she won't do it.'

'No, indeed !' responded the angry handmaid. 'She disturbed me in the middle of washing the babies' things, ma'am, to make the stuff for her ; and now,

just when I'm settled to my washing again, I'm to stop it all to clean up this.'

'I think you must have spent nearly as much time wrangling here as it would have taken you to clean the carpet,' replied Hope's gentle voice. 'We want those things washed to-day; so will you get a cloth and some hot water, and let us get rid of this paste, and then you can go back to your work.'

'No; I ain't going to do it, ma'am. I told Miss Fenwick I wouldn't, and I won't!'

'Hannah, it's I who ask you now to do it,' her mistress answered gently, but firmly, and with the slightest stress on the word 'ask,' which was yet perceptible enough to have an effect upon Hannah. She did not resist any longer, but went off with a parting snort of defiance, intended for Ursula.

'So you are not turning her off, or anything?' the latter exclaimed indignantly.

'No; I don't think the fault has been all on Hannah's side. Will you come into my room, while I take off my things, and then we can talk this affair over?'

'No; I don't want a sermon from you. I see you mean to take her part.'

'I don't wish to take anyone's part in particular, and I have already reproved her for the way she spoke. But, Ursula, if you won't come and talk quietly about it—which would be much the best—I must say one thing here. I can't have a great deal of unnecessary extra work put upon Hannah, as if she had hardly anything to do. She works *hard* all day; and though

I try, to the best of my power, to let mamma and you feel the change in your life as little as possible, I can't have her "put upon"—as they say—unnecessarily. So will you remember, please, that either you must do little things yourself, or they can't be done at all ?

Ursula had been obliged to listen to this, for Hope was standing on the first step of the staircase and had put her arm across to the banisters, as a bar, so that she could not get past.

'Well,' she said, in a sulky tone, 'this is quite a new idea, that one can't order one's servants about !'

'Hannah is not exactly your servant,' Hope answered with a quiet dignity, which Ursula felt. 'But if she were, I don't think it is ever the pleasantest way to *order* a thing to be done. Hannah is not accustomed to it; for neither Walter nor I ever do it, or let the children. It isn't the spirit or manner which the Bible teaches us Christians ought to have.'

'I'm not a Christian,' grunted Ursula.

'You won't live as one, perhaps; but you bear the name, and can't get rid of it, and so God has a right to expect you to live a very different life from a poor heathen. Don't you want to be really "Christ's one"?' Hope asked, laying her hand on the girl's arm.

'No,' she answered shortly.

'He wants you so much, dear; and you'll want Him one day,' her sister replied sorrowfully. But Ursula shook off the detaining hand and ran downstairs.

'Before it's too late, I trust,' added Hope to herself, as she went to take off her hat and jacket, and then

ran down to take a bunch of primroses into the drawing-room for Mrs. Fenwick to arrange. It was one of her chief pleasures; and as Hope loved to have flowers about, but could rarely find time to arrange them herself, she was glad to give this occupation over to her mother-in-law. From the drawing-room she went to the kitchen, to speak to Hannah on the subject of her behaviour to Ursula. Hannah was devoted to her mistress, and listened meekly to her gentle but grave words of reproof, and was, at the same time, consoled by the information that Hope had told Miss Fenwick that Hannah had not the time to be bothered with little things, and that she would try and prevent its happening again.

But though peace was thus restored, and there was not another scene of this kind, Ursula continued a very troublesome inmate of the Vicarage. She seemed determined not to accommodate herself to her present circumstances—grumbled incessantly because Walter said he could not afford to hire a horse for her to ride, or to keep the two or three dogs she wished to have. She was sure it was only because he was disagreeable, and appeared to forget that he had sold his own favourite Jock, and they had now no pets but the cat, who catered for herself. Moreover, Ursula was utterly reckless of the wear and tear of her garments, and, as she hated needlework, never thought of mending them for herself, any more than she did of offering to help in other things.

Walter and Hope did not exactly blame her for all

this. She had been brought up in an atmosphere of excessive self-indulgence, which had tended to increase the natural selfishness of her disposition. Her father had died when she was still a child, and from that time no one really attempted to check her faults, except her elder brother and sister ; and the latter marrying when Ursula was only eleven, and Walter being but seldom at home, she had the reins in her own hands henceforth. And kind though Mrs. Fenwick was, and grieved at her daughter's coldness and want of affection, she had never shown forth the beauty of true Christian love and self-denial in her own life, and it was, therefore, no wonder if her children were without it. She was much distressed at Ursula's inconsiderate ways now ; but her timid words of reproof had small effect, and Hope never complained to her of the trouble the girl gave, knowing well that this would certainly set her more against them.

## CHAPTER XIII.

‘It seems as if God gathers into His storehouse, from each of our lives, all that is pleasing to Himself—fruit in which He delights. And the daily cross-bearings and self-denials, the bright word spoken when head and heart are weary, the meek endurance of misunderstanding, the steady going on in one unbroken round, with a patient cheerfulness that knows nothing of “moods,”—all these are garnered there, and add to our riches towards Him ; riches which shall be manifested in “that day.”’—HETTY BOWMAN.

It was well for Walter and Hope Fenwick that they had the sure confidence in a never-failing Guide, which enabled them, after every fresh disappointment or increase of care, to turn ‘cheerly to their work again ;’ for the outward aspect of affairs at Cotstone was not very cheerful. Mrs. Fenwick had never recovered the shock which the loss of her fortune had caused her, and gradually failed more in health, and required frequent visits from the doctor. True, having once learnt by a ‘side-wind’ that Mr. Fenwick was entirely supporting his step-mother and her children, Dr. Bell now steadily refused to accept any fee ; but medicines had to be paid for, while a great deal of extra work was entailed by her enfeebled condition. Indeed, it was

matter for surprise to some people how the work was done at all in that house—with four children, all more or less babies, a delicate and very helpless mother-in-law, and numberless parish claims into the bargain. Hope herself sometimes wondered at the end of the day how it was she had got through all that had been done, and felt as if she must surely have omitted something. Nor was there any prospect of her cares or labours being lightened; for though Lionel was to leave them next year, and go into an engineer's office, on which profession he had decided, there would still be expenses with regard to him—while his ready help in all hard work would be much missed by her, more particularly that, when he left, there would probably be another little one to give her increased occupation.

‘How well I remember saying once to Colonel Lester that I should be quite miserable if I hadn't a lot to do; that there was always a quantity of steam in me that wanted blowing off! It was the very first day I saw Walter, I remember. Well, I certainly can't complain now of not having enough to do: though I don't think there's quite so much actual steam to blow off as there was then. I believe, though, that if I had a little “play-time” given me now, I should be as merry as a kitten at once; and I'm very happy as it is. Still, I can't help dreading this winter a little. The children want some new clothes; but it's useless to think of getting them, for we must provide Lionel with some things when he leaves, and both he and Bernard are growing so

terribly fast. I wish I could get some more money by painting; but I can't find the time, I'm sure, nor the strength either, I expect; at all events, not just now. No; that must wait till next summer—even if I find time for it then, which I doubt. For there never seemed any this year; and when there's another baby there will be still less. How close upon each other's heels the little creatures come! But they are welcome—my precious children!—and, however many of them there may be, there will always be plenty of love for each one, even though there mayn't be very much of anything else. I do hope, though, that I shan't have to see them really want. I don't know how I should bear it. And it will assuredly be difficult to make ends meet this winter. I wouldn't grudge mamma what she costs us, but it is hard when it makes less for our own little ones. However, I mustn't be taking anxious thought for the morrow; there's plenty in to-day's work to occupy my mind.'

So mused Hope, while dressing one autumn morning, as she thought over all there was to do that day. She was ready by six o'clock, and was busy dusting and arranging the furniture in the sitting-rooms till seven, when Maggie and Milford had to be got up and dressed, and then the twins; and by the time all this was over, Hope did not feel quite so brisk as when she first came downstairs. It was no use thinking about that, however, with the whole day before her.

As soon as breakfast was over, there was the kitchen to be visited, and the stores to be given out—not that



there was very much of them, though; and then she came to the dining-room to give her little girl her easy lessons: but neither of the children were there.

Hope looked into the kitchen.

‘Have you seen the children, Hannah?’

‘No, ma’am.’

She went to the foot of the stairs and called, ‘Maggie! Milford!’ when Lionel opened the study-door.

‘I saw the children go past the window with Ursula, five minutes ago,’ he said.

‘Oh! then they must have gone with her to hunt for eggs. Thank you, Lionel. Did you see if they had put anything on?’

‘Hats, I think. I don’t know about anything else.’

‘Come, Lionel, don’t be leaving your work in the middle like this,’ called Walter from within the study, and the boy retreated.

Hope felt a little bit annoyed.

‘I dare say Lionel would have gone to find them for me, if Walter hadn’t been in such a hurry about his studies,’ she said to herself. ‘Now I shall have to go and fetch them, and I dare say find them in a great mess, grubbing about in the wood-pile. Bother!’

But here something reproved her for her ill-humour.

‘What a nasty creature I am!’ she exclaimed mentally. ‘When Walter gives up so much of his time to helping Lionel with his work, I’m vexed because he won’t let him come to be my fag just when I want

him. And then grudging the children the fun of an egg-hunt, just because it obliges me to go out and look for them! Poor little pets! they don't have much fun, and, at least, I needn't grudge them whatever they can make for themselves. No, my darlings, you shan't see mother coming for you with a long, sour face! But how far I am still from being the wife and mother I ought to be—and God means me to be!

Thus talking with herself, Hope took down her waterproof from its peg in the hall, and, throwing it on, sallied forth.

The morning was still and damp, with a muggy feeling in the air that was not exactly invigorating. A few late China roses were still in bloom, and she stopped to gather one with something of a sigh at the thought of how soon all the flowers would be gone. She went on, past the study window, along the little dark, shady path that led to the kitchen-garden, and through that to the orchard.

Sure enough, there were Ursula and the children, eagerly hunting for eggs. This was the one piece of work which the former had undertaken of her own accord, for it fell in with her tastes, and she was now hunting and poking about in the wood-pile, while hardly anything was visible of Milford but his legs, so far had he penetrated into its recesses.

Maggie was searching the hedges when she heard her mother's voice calling her. She looked round, scrambled out of the ditch, and ran towards her.

'Mother! look at this egg; it's quite warm!'

‘So it is; this is one of Blackie’s eggs, isn’t it? But, my Maggie, how wet your boots are! and you ought to have a jacket on, dear. Oh, Mil!’ as that young gentleman backed out of the wood-pile and came tumbling towards them, with bare knees, hands, and the front of his frock covered with damp, brown earth.

‘Mother! one—two eggs! Mother! not go in now?’

‘No; you can stay out, you little pickle! but I want you for your lessons, Maggie dear.’

Maggie rather reluctantly accompanied her mother indoors, where ‘Reading without Tears’ was gone prosperously through; and, by the time it was over, the poor women had begun to arrive to pay in their money to the Clothing Club—it being the day for that.

Hope adjourned to what was generally called the store-room, which was another room on the ground-floor, fitted up with cupboards, and furnished only with a table and some plain chairs—where classes were held and they did anything which would make a litter; and Maggie and Milford ran in and out and played and asked questions, and were rather a bother sometimes: but there was no one else to look after them, for they did not like being with their aunt, or she to have them—father and Uncle Lionel were in the study, and Hannah busy about the house.

However, at last this work was over. Hope glanced at her watch, and saw that there was still a little

time before she would have to go and dress Mrs. Fenwick, for she was still her lady's-maid. Ursula had offered, from very shame, to undertake the work, and had tried one day; but, though her mother said nothing about it, she herself did not hesitate to inform Hope that it had been a complete failure, and made no obstacle when her sister said they had better return to the former arrangement.

Having these few minutes to spare still, Hope sat down to employ her fingers in knitting a stocking and her eyes in studying her Sunday-school lesson, till she heard Mrs. Fenwick's bell and went upstairs, having first given the children their box of bricks. She was in the middle of her hair-dressing, when there was a ring at the door-bell, and presently Hannah came up to say that Martha Higgins had brought her club-money.

'Oh, Martha, Martha! I wonder if you will ever come at the right time!' exclaimed Hope, half-sighing and half-laughing. 'Hannah, ask Miss Fenwick if she would mind taking it for me. She'll find—but stay! she doesn't know anything about it; I expect it will be more trouble at the end. Mamma, will you excuse me for a moment? I'll be back directly.'

'You didn't ought to be running up and downstairs more than you can help, ma'am,' said Hannah, as her mistress came out of the room. 'I wish I could have took the money for you; but I don't understand them books.'

'Thank you, Hannah, very much; but I must go up

and down, you know, so it's no use talking about it,' Hope replied, with her sweet smile of thanks; and as she rather wearily ascended the stairs again, after gently reproving Martha Higgins, she said to herself, 'It's my Father's will that this interruption should have come to me; and to see His Hand sending it straight down from heaven makes it a joy, instead of a worry.'

Mrs. Fenwick was more than usually feeble that morning, so that her toilet took a particularly long time, and Hope had rather hard work to be patient and bear with her fussiness and dawdling, when she thought of all there still was to be done that day—and it had been nearly twelve o'clock when she came up to her. But at last her mother-in-law was got down to the dining-room, where Lionel was setting the table for the early dinner; for he always took upon himself this part of 'flunkey's work,' as he termed it. With a sigh, Hope put on one side a heap of garments to be mended, which ought to have been begun on that morning, and then hurried off to brush her hair and wash her hands before the meal; for both she and Walter were particular always to appear fresh and neat—plain and worn though their dress might be—at these times of the family assembling together. It meant another journey upstairs for her, but Hope did not mind that; for it also meant a few minutes of perfect quiet in her own room, when she could commune undisturbed with her God, and, leaving all the labours and worries and sins of the morning with Him, come down, strengthened and peaceful, to continue the trivial

round and common task. She would not have missed those two or three moments for anything.

It was a constant subject of wonder to Mrs. Fenwick how it was that both Hope and Walter were always so bright at dinner, able to laugh and talk, and not seeming at all weighed down by all the work they had gone through in the course of the morning. But *they* did not wonder; for each knew that the other had just come straight from the presence of God; so the wonder to them would have been if they had not been cheerful.

‘What are people in general going to do this afternoon?’ Walter inquired, when the business of helping the Irish stew had been gone through. (It was very genuinely Irish in its nature, being almost entirely composed of potatoes and vegetables.)

‘I am going to see old John Walker and to read to Alice Green,’ Hope said, ‘and then, I think, I shall stay quietly at home; for I have mending to do, and there has been a good deal of work this morning.’

‘Yes, you had better rest this afternoon. Are you tired, dear?’ her husband asked, rather anxiously.

‘A little,’ was the answer, with a quiet smile. ‘Hush, Milford!’ as he began drumming on the table.

‘Me want some more, mother.’

‘You can’t have any more, dearie,’ his mother replied rather sadly, glancing at the almost empty dish before her husband.

‘Ow! me so hungry!’

‘Here! there are two or three potatoes and a little of

the "juice" left,' Walter said. 'Send up his plate, dear.'

Milford's wants being supplied, he was left to finish, while the rest of the party proceeded to their 'second course,' such as it was.

'Will you go out to-day, mamma? it would do you good,' Hope said presently.

'No, dear, I think not; it's so damp and chilly.'

'You would be warmer for a little turn. Put on your sealskin and you won't find it cold; there's no wind.'

'It's not a bad day at all,' Lionel said. 'Look here, mamma! you and I will go for a walk! I'll take you along the Duncombe road, where it's flat and not very wet, and we'll do capitally. Do come!'

'Very well, dear boy—if you like; perhaps it may do me good. Only, we must go soon, before it gets at all late.'

'Oh yes; I'm ready whenever you are.'

'I am going over the hill to see the people at Bessbrook. Would you like to come, Ursula? you are fond of that walk, and you needn't come into the cottages if you don't like,' Walter said.

'No, thank you. I mean to go to Foxley to see Florence Bailey, which will be much more lively than dancing attendance in the lane, while you hop in and out of those dirty holes.'

'Just as you please; but I don't like to hear our people's cottages called "dirty holes"—and I believe you know that.'

Ursula made no answer, and they presently rose—Lionel clearing the table, and Walter putting his wife into an armchair by the fire, while he leant over the back, and they chose the chants and hymns for the next Sunday together. Soon, Lionel conveyed the dishes into the kitchen, followed by the children, and presently came back, saying :

‘I’m ready now, mamma, if you like to go out. I’ve had a game with Hannah,’ he continued, turning to Hope. ‘She thought I couldn’t be trusted to wash a dish, and wanted to take it herself; but I told her if she touched it, I’d eat her—and so she subsided.’

‘Into a fit of laughter, I should think,’ remarked Hope. ‘We shall all miss our flunkey very much when he’s gone, I know that. You had better go out, mamma, hadn’t you? I’ll come and put your things on, and then go out myself. Were all the children in the kitchen, Lionel?’

‘Yes; shall I fetch them?’

‘No, thank you; I only want to get them ready for their walk.’

‘I’ll carry up one of the babies for you,’ Lionel said, darting into the kitchen and picking up one baby, while Hope followed and took the other.

Having landed them in the nursery, she returned to Mrs. Fenwick; and, after seeing her safely off on her boy’s arm, went back to dress the four children.

Soon the whole house was quiet: Walter striding over the hills to a distant hamlet, and thinking regret-



fully of the dear dog-companion who used to accompany him on his walks ; Lionel squiring his mother carefully along the Duncombe road ; Hannah out with the twins in the perambulator, and the other two children running about her ; Hope gone into the village ; and Ursula on her way to her friends at Foxley—sporting people, whom the Walter Fenwicks did not much like.

Mrs. Fenwick was back first, and then Hope, who sat down at once to her mending, while her mother-in-law wrote letters. Presently the children returned ; and, as Hannah had cleaning to do, all four came into the dining-room, and there was no more real quiet for Hope.

The twins—active, riotous babies—needed constant looking after ; and, after a time, Maggie and Milford grew tired of their toys, and he began to tease her ; so then their mother called them to her and proposed to tell them a story, which caused great clamour of delight, and much subsequent climbing on her and questioning.

Hope was an excellent story-teller, and her children did not so often get the chance of having her to themselves in this way as not to hail the proposal with noise, such as she would willingly have dispensed with. But she would not silence their little tongues ; and, at least, she was sitting still—‘For which you may be thankful,’ she said to herself.

She had just finished the story, and Mrs. Fenwick had gone off into a doze on the sofa, when Walter came in.

‘Why, Walter! back already?’

‘Yes; I haven’t been to Bessbrook. I stopped at Jackson’s cottage on the way, and I found her, poor thing, taken ill suddenly. She had no one to send for the doctor, and she wanted so much to see you; she said you would do her good; she doesn’t know what is the matter. I’ve sent off Willie Miller to Duncombe; but, of course, Dr. Bell can’t be there for a long time, so I came to see if you thought you *could* come to her?’

Hope was silent for a minute; but then she said: ‘Oh yes; I’ll go and get ready,’ and rose.

‘I’ll fetch your things down for you. I wish you hadn’t to go, dear; but the poor woman seemed so bad,’ said Walter, as he left the room.

He was soon down again, and in a few minutes they started. It was a great effort to Hope, although she had her husband’s arm, and the pleasure of a walk with him, which she did not so often get now as in former days.

‘I hope it won’t hurt you, Hope,’ Walter said, as they went slowly up the hillside. ‘It seemed cruel to leave the poor creature alone all that time, without anyone to do a thing for her.’

‘I don’t think it will do me any harm. It is only strange that this should come on a day when there has been a great deal to do already. All the interruptions seem to come in a lump together.’

‘Yes; but I’ll tell you the sort of thought that seems to come out of that. God has been putting a new piece of music before you to-day, called “Inter-

ruptions." It's in a minor key, and the discords don't sound very well at first; but when you've learnt it, you'll find they will all harmonize into something sweet and grand and beautiful.'

'Oh, Walter, that is a lovely thought! Thank you so much for it. I shall remember it next time the interruptions come. Won't it be splendid when we have learnt all our music, and can play it without any mistakes?'

'Grand! And there will be one new thing to learn then.'

'What?' asked Hope.

'The "Hallelujah Chorus!"—a better one than even Handel's, though,' Walter answered. 'We can never really learn that here; and, indeed, I believe Eternity will not be long enough to get to the end of it.'

They had reached the cottage now, and Walter left his wife there while he went to other parishioners. She could not leave for a long time, and when she got home was thoroughly tired; but, after tea, she roused herself to put the babies to bed, and then came down to find Mrs. Fenwick in a great fuss because Ursula had not come back and it was almost dark. Lionel was despatched to go and meet her; and then, as the dining-room was quiet, Walter being in his study, and the children with Hannah, Hope agreed to lie on the sofa while she pursued her mending.

At first there was silence; but, as she folded up a garment and put it on one side, she observed, glancing at her mother-in-law with a smile:

‘I suppose it is a very low way in which to take those words, but at the end of such a day of work as this has been, one does appreciate the promise—“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”’

‘Yes, you want rest, I know, dear; and I’m sure I do, too. It is indeed true that “all is vanity,”’ Mrs. Fenwick replied, in a melancholy tone.

‘Do you think that because Solomon had to arrive at that conclusion, we must all do the same?’ Hope asked, smiling a little.

‘Well, I’m sure I have proved it, my dear.’

‘But have you proved nothing else, mamma? If you have found that earthly things are vanity, haven’t you found that God is unchangeable and abiding?’

‘Yes; I hope heaven will make up to me at the end for all I have gone through here,’ Mrs. Fenwick answered, rather evasively.

‘But do you mean that you have nothing that can make up to you—even now—for the loss of your fortune?’

‘Ah, my dear, you don’t know what it is to find one’s self suddenly, in one’s old age, reduced to beggary!—obliged to leave one’s children dependent on the charity of others! You can’t know how hard it is;’ and Mrs. Fenwick’s tears began to flow.

‘Never having had a fortune to lose, I can’t understand it, of course,’ Hope replied, a little bit drily. ‘But, seriously, dear mamma, you can’t mean to say that the religion you have professed for so many years

gives you no comfort now when trouble comes? It can't be worth the name if it turns out to be vanity, too.'

'I didn't mean to say that, of course, dear Hope. I know Who has sent all my troubles, and it is vain to murmur, for, of course, He knows and does best; and then, as I said, I hope I may get rest and happiness at last.'

'And is that all the comfort you have?' her daughter-in-law asked, after she had been silent a moment, looking very grave.

'I don't see what else we can expect, dear.'

'Then,' said Hope, after another pause, with a force of conviction in her tone that quite surprised Mrs. Fenwick, 'I am sure that we do not know Christ as we ought.'

Mrs. Fenwick looked startled, even frightened; but she was silent, and Hope went on:

'You must not think me hard, mamma; but I don't think you can be learning all that you are meant to from your troubles. Indeed'—she hesitated a little—'I think it is very sad that all your previous life should not have taught you to know Christ as the Friend Who has helped you in every little thing, and so will not fail you now.'

'It is so difficult, Hope, to do what one ought. There is so much in the world to hinder one; but I hope I do know a little—I hope He is my Saviour,' Mrs. Fenwick said, in a trembling, hesitating tone.

'Well, if we know Him to be our Saviour—if we

know He has forgiven us, it seems to me that He has given us the strongest pledge of His being our Friend ; and I don't know why we do not make Him so in everything,' Hope said.

' But, my dear, you don't seem to consider that He is God, and that we are such miserable creatures. I could not approach Him as I would an earthly friend, because He may not, after all, have accepted me.'

' Do you mean, mamma, that you are not sure, at this moment, that you may not be in danger of God's wrath ?' her daughter-in-law asked, in a tone of grieved surprise.

' I can't be sure about it, dear, in this life. I hope it may not be so—but—I must leave it.'

' Oh, I am so sorry !' Hope exclaimed. Then, after a minute, she went on : ' Mamma, may I speak very plainly to you ?'

' Of course, darling.'

' Well,' said Hope, ' do you know, I think if you had ever really had it settled between yourself and God, as to whether He *had* saved you—as He means it to be settled by us all, I'm sure—you must then have gone on to make Him your Master and your Friend, and you would have had so much more comfort and *real happiness* in your life.'

' Perhaps so, my child ; but I suppose we are not all meant to have happiness, and certainly I have not known it.'

' Haven't you ? How strange, with so much to make life bright !' Hope said, looking surprised, and then

adding: 'But, of course, there is no happiness to be found out of Christ; and if we don't know that we are His, no wonder if we are miserable.'

'It's all very beautiful, what you say, dear,' said Mrs. Fenwick presently; 'but I must say it seems to me much the most fitting thing for us sinners not to be so confident about our salvation. At least, we are then safe from the sin of presumption.'

'And if we venture to say that we believe God is loving enough to be willing to save us, and, having once saved us, is strong enough to be able to keep us if we will only leave ourselves in His hands, at least we are then safe from the sin of making Him a liar,' Hope rejoined in a demure, matter-of-fact tone; but Mrs. Fenwick was again startled by the unsparing plainness of her words. She would not have thought Hope could speak so strongly.

'Shall I tell you what I think, dear mamma?' the latter continued presently, with her own gentle manner. 'God has not let you find happiness or peace all these years, because He wanted to bring you to the only place where you can have it. It is just as old George Herbert says:

"That, at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to My breast."

Mrs. Fenwick's tears were flowing quietly; but she did not speak, and Hope added: 'You are not going to wait to be tossed to His breast till you get to heaven, are you, mamma? I don't think Herbert meant that,

and certainly the Bible doesn't. Jesus gives "rest" now to all the weary and heavy-laden who come to Him.'

'I suppose you have this rest, dear Hope? but how do you know it?' Mrs. Fenwick asked timidly.

' "I know Whom I have believed"—that's all,' was the answer, with a grave, sweet look.

But now Lionel and Ursula came in, and Hope rose to put away her work. The conversation was not resumed, for it was seldom that she got a quiet time for a regular talk; and the next month there were other things to think about, in the birth of the little son who came to add to the party already assembled within the Vicarage walls.



CHAPTER XIV.

'When death is coming near,  
And thy heart shrinks in fear,  
And thy limbs fail,  
Then raise thy hands and pray  
To Him Who smooths the way  
Through the dark vale.

'Seest thou the eastern dawn?  
Hear'st thou, in the red morn,  
The angel's song?  
Oh, lift thy drooping head,  
Thou who, in gloom and dread,  
Hast lain so long.'

*Sintram.*

'So you can't be free from that youngster, Hope?' said Lionel, coming into the dining-room one day in the following January, and finding his sister-in-law ironing at the table, with the cradle beside her containing the new baby, now nearly two months old.

'No,' answered she, with a smile. 'He cries so if he is away from me, that I'm obliged to have him here.'

'Ah, Master Frankie! you're a young rascal to bother your "ma" so!' Lionel said, bending down and

snapping his fingers at the baby. 'Well, I'm off to Duncombe with Walter.'

'You will have a capital walk. I have given my commissions to him. Has he your prescriptions, mamma?'

'Oh no, my dear. Lionel, you must take them,' said Mrs. Fenwick, nervously fumbling in her desk. 'To think that this is the last time I shall give you commissions to do for me!'

'Oh no, mamma!' Lionel replied cheerfully. 'I shall always be fag and errand-boy in my holidays; that is, if Mr. and Mrs. Vicar will allow me to turn up here sometimes.'

'I should think we would!' was the warm answer from Hope. 'But I expect Walter is ready by this time, Lionel; and you take up a lot of room, where we are pretty full already,' she added, laughing.

'There's some lumber here which might just as well be elsewhere,' he remarked, glancing at Ursula, who was seated in one of the windows reading a yellow-covered novel.

'Hush!' said Hope, in a low tone, putting her hand on his arm, for she perceived the girl look up with an unpleasant frown; and Lionel yielded to her gentle authority, and restrained the strong inclination he felt to upset his sister, pitch the novel out of window, and set her strong arms to work on the ironing. Then, hearing his brother's step in the hall, he said good-bye, and ran out, and the two set off for Duncombe.

This was Lionel's last day but one at Cotstone ; the day after the following one he was going up to London to enter the engineer's office in which a place had been obtained for him. He had a taste for that kind of work, and there was every hope that he would get on in it ; but it was certainly a come-down for the youth who had at one time been heir to Storr House and considerable wealth. This weighed far more heavily on his mother, however, than on himself ; he was more downcast at the idea of leaving Walter and Hope, for whom his affection had very much increased since he came to be under their roof, and whose bright and consistent Christianity had influenced him more perhaps than he was aware of.

Late in the afternoon of the next day Hope came into his room, where he was packing, with a pile of garments—some new, others neatly mended ; but all the handiwork—more or less—of her skilful fingers.

'Here are your things,' she said. 'I think all—even the mended ones—will last some time without wanting anything doing to them ; and you must be careful of them, sir,' she added, with a playful smile.

Lionel took them from her with a grave wistful expression that was by no means unbecoming to his brown, handsome face.

'Thank you very much,' he said. 'I wish you hadn't had first to fork out to get them for me, and then to slave away at the making of them as you have done.'

'I haven't minded the one or the other. The buying

and the making were both things that had to be done, and so we knew they were appointed for us, like anything else.'

'Well, you may be sure I shall take care of them, and they'll always remind me of you; not that they'll be needed to do that, though,' Lionel said, beginning to put the garments in his portmanteau.

'Homely sort of reminders—not much sentiment in them,' Hope observed, with a merry twinkle in her eyes, and Lionel laughingly agreed. 'We have got to know each other so well in this year, haven't we?' she went on. 'You don't know how sorry I am to lose you, my good old sumpter-mule!'

'Oh, I feel as if I had known you for years!' the boy replied, looking up with a pleasant smile. 'I shall miss you awfully.'

'You will have One with you, though, Whom I hope you will make your Friend in everything,' Hope said, in her gentle voice.

'Yes—I want to do right,' Lionel answered, in a low tone.

'I'm sure you do. I have been thinking that a nice motto for you in all your London life would be just these three little words—"For Christ's sake." Resist temptation—"for Christ's sake;" do your work thoroughly and perfectly honestly—"for Christ's sake;" try to help others who may be weaker than you—"for Christ's sake." Do you like my text and the little sermon on it?' she asked, smiling.

'Yes. You and Walter do take a lot of trouble

about me. I'm sure I shall try and keep right, if only for your sakes.'

'Yes; but it should not be *only*, or even principally for our sakes.'

'No,' replied Lionel, and paused thoughtfully. 'But, I say, you oughtn't to be staying here in the cold!' he exclaimed a few moments later, looking up at Hope, who had seated herself on the bed with her knitting.

'Do you want to get rid of me?' she asked, smiling. 'I thought I would come here for a little quiet, as baby has at last consented to go to sleep, and Walter is amusing the children.'

'I wish anything could be done to take some of your work off your hands,' Lionel responded; 'but if I get on, I hope I shall be able to give mamma and the others a home some day; but I'm afraid that's rather a distant prospect. However, I ought to be able soon to contribute something towards expenses—oughtn't I?'

'Yes, I dare say; but I'm afraid it's rather doubtful, Lionel, if, by the time your home is ready for her, your dear mother may not have no more need of an earthly home.'

'Hope!' exclaimed the boy, looking up with a startled, troubled expression.

'She seems to me to have failed very much lately, and Dr. Bell thinks rather seriously of her, I know—besides her feeling herself ill.'

'But she always thought that, and I believe other people only considered it fussiness.'

'Yes; but this is different. She is really suffering

now, and Dr. Bell doesn't make light of it ; and he's not a gloomy doctor, you know. She has never been the same since you lost everything ; the shock seems to have affected her heart, and I suppose it was never very strong.'

'Heart-disease ! Oh, I say !' Lionel exclaimed.

'No, no ! not real heart-disease,' Hope said, smiling a little ; 'but I'm afraid there is something else as well the matter with mamma. I didn't know whether to tell you ; but then I thought I had better, in case any thing *should* happen.'

'Oh, Hope, you don't think it will come soon ?' he said, winking away the tears that had sprung to his eyes.

'We can't tell,' she replied gently. 'It may go on like this for a long time ; but I do think she has got worse lately, and that is why I spoke to you.'

'Oh, I'm glad you told me !'

He stopped short, and worked on diligently with his packing ; but presently, after brushing his eyes several times with his hand, he gave one or two gulps, and then laid his head down on his box and fairly cried. Hope did not speak, but only stroked his hair with her gentle hand ; and, after a minute or two, Lionel partially recovered himself, and looking up, said, half-apologetically :

'I couldn't help it—it's hard enough to have to leave her and all of you ; and then to think that perhaps I shall never see her again !' and down went the head again.

'Poor boy ! but we don't think that's likely, Lionel

dear. It won't be sudden, most likely ; and, of course, we should send for you if there was danger. But it's better not to look on into the future ; it's in God's keeping, and we won't try to pry into His plans. But there's baby crying again ! I must go ;' and she gathered up her knitting and hastened out of the room.

It was as Hope had said : Mrs. Fenwick was failing, and Lionel's departure seemed to give another blow to her declining strength. She gradually became more feeble, and subject to attacks of pain and faintness, and before he had been gone six weeks she was entirely confined to her room, though not to her bed. Of course, this entailed an extra fire and a great deal of extra work besides ; and it was a more than ever serious question now with her son and daughter-in-law, how to make ends meet, or accomplish all that had to be done. The new baby was a delicate little fellow, needing much care, and wanting to be constantly in his mother's arms—no joke, when there were so many other things to occupy her hands.

Mrs. Fenwick did not mean to give trouble ; but it never seemed to strike her that her bell very often interrupted Hope or Hannah in the middle of washing, or cooking, or other equally important household occupation. Previous to her loss of fortune, her existence had been that of a spoilt child, every wish and whim being gratified, and ~~never~~ called on to do anything for herself that others could do ; and she seemed unable to take in how different things were now. And Hope and Walter did not like to remonstrate on the amount of

attention she required, for they felt that, do what they might, her present way of life was sadly different from what she had been used to; and now, in her suffering condition, they were anxious to make her as comfortable as they could. So no complaints were made—not even when, towards the end of March, she became much worse, took to her bed, and the doctor said that her room must be kept at an even temperature by a fire night and day. When he had gone, Hope went to the study to talk over matters with her husband.

‘Dr. Bell says mamma is not fit to be left alone, and indeed I can see that—she is so nervous and weak. Some one must always sleep in her room now, to keep up the fire and give her food; he says she ought to have constant nourishment.’

‘Where’s that coming from, though?’ asked Walter.

‘Ah, indeed! that’s the question. We must manage it though, somehow. I couldn’t bear that she should want anything, when, as it is, she must feel the difference so much between this and any illness she has had before.’

‘Well, then, dear, all we can do is to get the things as they are wanted, and trust God to provide the means.’

‘I think He will,’ Hope said softly. ‘But it is so sad to think that it can’t do poor mamma any good. Dr. Bell says she can never recover, and it may not be very long. I shall write to Lady Alice, and tell her about it; and I shouldn’t wonder if they came over here: I wish they would.’



‘Yes ; it would be a pleasure for you. You’ve had enough work as it is ; but I’m afraid we can’t shut our eyes to the fact that there is still more in prospect for you.’

‘It isn’t the work I mind ; but, Walter, if mamma is to have the delicacies she requires, we must be still more economical in our way of living ; I think we must do almost entirely without meat.’

‘Very well, dear ; I don’t mind.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Hope, smiling ; ‘but you ought to have it, with all your hard work, and I don’t like to think of your having to go without it. And then, the children ! Oh, Walter, we never thought we should have to see our children want, and now we must ! It’s been such a trial this winter to see them without the warm clothes and food they ought to have ; and now, if things get worse——’ and poor Hope began to cry bitterly.

Walter was rather alarmed ; the whole thing was so unlike his bright little wife.

‘What is the matter, darling ?’ he asked tenderly. ‘It’s not like you to be so desponding.’

‘Nothing—only I’m very tired, and things look so dark,’ she answered, laying her head against her husband’s shoulder and wiping away her tears.

‘Poor child ! Yes—things do seem very dark, to our eyes ; but, you know, David could say, “The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want ;” and it is “the same Lord,” “yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Think of that, and be true to your name, my Hope.’

‘I will, dear,’ she replied. ‘I ought not to have “gloomed” in that way.’

‘I don’t know that it was exactly your fault,’ Walter said. ‘I’m afraid you are tired out, and though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak.’

‘You had better not make excuses for me—it’s rather dangerous, you know,’ Hope said, smiling. ‘But I must be off.’

She had quite regained her bright look; and, just when she had left the room, put her head in again at the door to say :

‘Walter, our Heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things. He *knoweth*—isn’t that nice?’

‘That it is, dear,’ her husband replied, answering her smile; and, when she had closed the door, before resuming his writing, he thanked God for the wife whom He had given him, and for the grace that had made her what she was—the light of his home.

Leaving the study, Hope went in search of Ursula, whom she found stretched out in an armchair before the dining-room fire, skimming a magazine.

‘What does Dr. Bell say about mamma?’ she asked, as her sister came in.

‘I’m afraid she’s very ill. He says she can never get better,’ Hope answered.

‘Do you mean she’s in danger?’ Ursula asked sharply.

‘No, not just now; but he thinks her strength is going, though it may last longer than he imagines.’

Ursula looked into the fire, with a softer expression on her face than Hope had yet seen there. She wondered what was passing in the mind of the girl, who seemed so wanting in natural affection; but she did not speak, and presently Hope went on:

‘I wanted to speak to you about the arrangements we must make now. There must be a fire always kept up in her room, and some one must sleep there, because she is to have food continually. You would like to be her nurse, I dare say?’

‘Oh, I don’t know; I expect I should do her more harm than good. I never seem able to say or do a single thing that is to her taste, and I believe she’s best pleased when she neither sees nor hears me.’

‘Ursula! you shouldn’t say such things! Besides, are you sure that you have ever tried to please her, and make her like to have you with her? I’m sure she’s always ready enough to show affection, if one doesn’t throw cold water on it.’

‘Well, I don’t know, I’m sure. I don’t see how I ever could suit her; for she’s so “faddy” and full of nerves and sentiment and all that sort of thing, and I haven’t a bit of it. And, of course, I can’t alter my nature, or always be thinking how to speak and behave exactly contrary to what I feel. She worships you, I know, of course. You’re pretty and I’m ugly, and she can’t abide ugly people.’

‘Your looks are not the wor——’ began Hope, but stopped short in the middle of a word, and coloured,

with a look of shame. Ursula continued, in her disagreeable tone :

‘ Besides, you have always laid yourself out to make the agreeable to her, and let her pet you and mess you about, and you always pander to her whims and fancies. Now, I never was a toady.’

Hope’s cheek flushed at this rude speech, and she was on the point of leaving the room without a word ; but she had learnt a good deal of self-control, after several failures, in the year that Ursula had been in her house, and having, a minute before, nearly given vent to a sharp remark, she was doubly on her guard ; so she only bit her lip and remained silent. She did not know that the thought of soon losing her mother had filled Ursula’s heart with a sore, remorseful feeling, which she vented in the most disagreeable speeches she could think of. She saw that she had wounded and irritated Hope now, almost to the last degree of endurance ; but she was jealous of the marked affection that her mother had always shown to Walter’s wife, and did not choose to acknowledge that it was her own fault that matters were different with her. However, Hope was thinking now of the work about the house that was awaiting her, and she began again :

‘ Then, don’t you mean to take any share in nursing mamma, Ursula ?’

‘ Oh yes, I will ; but you know I sleep all night through, so I don’t see that I shall be much good then. And I expect, whatever I do, mamma will get you to do over again ; I shall never manage it to suit her.’

'Please, Ursula dear, will you try and do it as well as you can?' said poor Hope, almost driven to despair. 'You know there are so many things in the house I must do, that I don't want to have more than my proper share of the nursing; indeed, I don't think I could manage it.'

'Oh, of course, yes! I'll do all right; only, for goodness' sake, don't let's have any crying!' Ursula exclaimed in an alarmed tone, perceiving tears in Hope's eyes.

'Very well, then;' and Hope was leaving the room, when she stopped to add: 'One thing more, Ursula. As mamma must always have a fire now, and other expensive things, we shall have to live still more plainly, and I'm afraid we must do without this fire.'

'Good gracious! in this cold weather?'

'There will be the kitchen fire still; so we can go in there and warm ourselves, if we get very perished,' Hope replied, speaking cheerfully. 'And perhaps we might manage to have one here in the evenings; we shall see. You must put on a shawl or jacket, you know.'

'It will be a wretched cold den,' grumbled Ursula. 'I think I shall invite myself to stay at the Baileys.'

'Ursula! when your mother is so ill!' exclaimed Hope, in a tone of reproachful surprise.

'Oh, I forgot. No, of course I can't;' and she looked considerably ashamed of herself.

The days that followed now were very wearing.

Mrs. Fenwick was a trying patient ; not ungrateful for what was done for her, yet restless and querulous, full of various small needs, some real, others fancied ; and from having, in previous illnesses, had servants whose sole business it was to wait on her and supply her every want, she forgot how many other occupations her present nurses had, and taxed their time and patience severely. Ursula took her share of waiting on her mother and sleeping in her room ; but her natural awkwardness and the careless and selfish habits in which she had grown up rendered her rather incompetent for this work. Hope's hospital-training and experience made her by far the most efficient nurse, and Mrs. Fenwick was not slow in discovering the difference between her way of doing things and that of Hannah and Ursula ; so that she hardly ever entered her mother-in-law's room without being met by, ' Oh, my dear, I'm so glad you are come—I want lifting up, and Ursula can't do it as you do.' And then there generally followed, ' Can't you stay, my dear ? No one can do anything properly for me but you ; I wish I could have you as my regular nurse.'

Hope bore with all this, though she often had to refuse Mrs. Fenwick's request to stop with her.

The invalid became almost daily weaker, so that it was soon necessary for some one to sit up at night with her. Neither Hannah nor Ursula seemed capable of staying awake ; so Hope took the greater part of this work upon herself, though sorely troubled as to what to do with her baby. However, after she had

hushed him to sleep, Walter constituted himself nurse to the young gentleman, and managed him so well, that it was but seldom that he interrupted her night-watch with the announcement, 'Here's that youngster howling awfully! can you come and hush him up? he won't stop for me.'

The lightening of some of her cares came from another quarter; for, just after Mrs. Fenwick had become so much worse, Lady Alice and her girls drove over to Cotstone, and, much distressed at Hope's worn appearance—which her bright smile and cheerful words could not entirely conceal—insisted on taking back with them the four elder children. Their mother was sorry to part with them, for their bright, winning ways were a great cheer to her in the midst of the trouble that was in the house; but she knew it would take a great deal off her hands, and, besides, they would have warm fires and plenty of good food at Badgery. But after she had kissed all the dear little faces, said 'good-bye,' and seen them drive off in the waggonette—Maggie and Milford kissing their hands to 'mother' standing in the porch, and the twins crowing and kicking, one in Lady Alice's arms and the other in Jessie's—she turned back into the house, feeling rather desolate. However, she soon set this feeling down as selfish and ungrateful, more especially when she saw the bare grate and remembered that there had been nothing but porridge for dinner—at which Ursula had grumbled, and had been sharply reprov'd by Walter—and, catching up her baby, she bestowed an extra

number of kisses on him, as he was the only one now at home to receive them.

‘I’m very glad the children are gone; it will relieve you, dear, to have them off your hands for a time,’ observed Mrs. Fenwick, when Hope came up to her.

‘Yes; it’s so kind of Lady Alice to take them. And it’s much better they should go, though I feel very strange without them; the house seems so empty.’

‘It’s beautifully quiet,’ Mrs. Fenwick said, with a sort of sigh of relief.

‘Ah, I am afraid their noise disturbed you, mamma.’

‘It did rather, my dear; but I knew you couldn’t help it. Shall you be able to be more with me now, dear Hope?’ continued the invalid, in her querulous tone.

‘I dare say I shall. Of course, not having to look after them will leave me more free for other things,’ Hope replied, secretly feeling disappointed, as she perceived that the small amount of leisure which the children’s absence gave her would not be available, as she had hoped, for visiting in the parish, which work she had been obliged to relinquish almost entirely of late.

‘I want to see as much of you as I can, dear,’ went on Mrs. Fenwick; ‘for I shall so soon have to leave you.’

‘Do you feel worse to-day?’ Hope inquired.

‘No, not particularly; but I know I can’t keep up



much longer ; my hold on life is getting very feeble. Hope, dear, you'll go with me as far as you can, won't you ? Don't leave me to face death alone ; I want some one to lean on.'

'Yes, dear mamma,' Hope answered, touched, and also really grieved at the sad, frightened tone. 'We'll help and comfort you all we can. But you won't have to face death alone at all ; don't think of such a thing. Why, mamma, Jesus would never leave us at such a time ! He will keep you safe.'

'Ah, dear ! but think what it is to go and face God soon—to stand before one's Judge, Hope ! Suppose He should not accept me ! And, indeed, I think it is more than probable that He will not ; for I'm afraid my life hasn't been what it ought ; I think I might have served Him better.'

'What makes you think so ?' Hope asked.

'What you said, dear, that day we had that talk, has made me think about it. I'm afraid I have allowed "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches" to choke the Word in my heart, though I think it was there. I don't think I was altogether worldly—do you, Hope ?' Mrs. Fenwick asked anxiously.

'I think you are the only one who can really give an answer to that question,' was the reply.

'I'm afraid the mistake was that religion was very often put second with me, though I didn't ignore it,' Mrs. Fenwick continued sorrowfully. 'And now, of course, there's no time to alter.'

Hope felt a sense of awe as she heard these words, which this hour of true reality called forth from the dying one ; but she spoke :

‘ You cannot alter your past life, of course ; but you don’t think, mamma, that because you have not served God as you ought, He won’t accept you ? Our acceptance doesn’t depend on our service, you know ; that is the second stage. Acceptance first—then service.’

‘ Oh, I wish I had tried to understand all this before !’ sighed Mrs. Fenwick.

‘ I wish you had, too,’ Hope gravely replied. ‘ I think, as I said that day, that if you had ever really considered the price at which your salvation was procured, and that God had given you everything which your soul could possibly want—you had only to take your place as His child—you must then have served Him, and you would have been so much happier. But your not having done it doesn’t alter His willingness to save you now. If you have never trusted Him yet as you should, don’t die dishonouring Him still by doubts. I think you must have been for some time past like the prodigal son—gone into a far country, spent all that you had of riches and pleasure, and then in want. I am sure you have felt in want.’

‘ Indeed I have, dear ; you are quite right.’

‘ Well, then, you see, unfortunately you have stopped there—you have not come back to the Father’s house, where you would have found all you could need. But won’t you come now ? Come back to our Father, dear mamma.’

'But I can't tell, Hope, if I come properly,' was the piteous reply. 'I mayn't have the right kind of faith.'

'No; our faith is generally worth nothing,' Hope replied quietly; 'but then we don't trust in that, but in Christ. He says, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake." Not for the sake of our faith, you see, but for *His own* sake.'

Hope spoke slowly and very emphatically; but she perceived that Mrs. Fenwick had been suddenly seized with faintness, and her attention was at once given to restoring her.

This was the last real conversation anyone had with the poor sufferer. She sank into a sort of half-unconscious state, or, when herself, was too weak to talk, and the doctor expressed his opinion that she could only last a few days. Lionel was sent for from London, and Bernard from his school; and the shadow of death lay indeed now on the little Vicarage. It was, truly, a dark shadow; for, though Hope and Walter looked beyond and knew that death was really but the beginning of life to the servant of God, the sad, trembling spirit in which the dying one passed through the valley made it seem, indeed, a gloomy and terrible journey. They did not attempt anything now but praying with her, or reading some Divine word of 'strong consolation,' which they trusted she might even now lay hold of.

Lent was drawing on, and they would soon be in

Holy Week. They just waited now from day to day, knowing that at any time the end might come.

Hope was in Mrs. Fenwick's room all the Tuesday night before Palm Sunday; for she had been restless, and her breathing laboured, and the doctor, who had been in the previous evening, had considered her sinking. Yet she lingered on through the next day; but as the afternoon was closing, Walter, coming in from a visit to a sick parishioner, was met by his wife, saying:

'Walter, will you find the boys and Ursula, and come?'

'Is she going?' he asked sorrowfully, and she made an affirmative sign, as she returned to the sick-room, while he summoned his sister and brothers.

There were not many words spoken, when they had all come in and knelt down, while the clergyman offered up a prayer for the departing soul, and for those about to be left orphans; and then Mrs. Fenwick signed for them all to come to her. Ursula and Bernard were sobbing; Lionel only shed a few tears, but his face showed great emotion. They came up to their mother, and she said feebly:

'Always love and help each other, dears. My darling boys, you must be *her* protectors'—signing towards Ursula; 'and you, my child, learn to fill a true sister's part towards your brothers. And Walter and Hope will always help you.'

Her voice almost entirely failed, as she struggled for breath, murmuring to Walter:

'My love to dear Georgie. I wish I could have seen her once more.'

Hope came and lifted her up, kissing her fondly, and Walter asked :

'Is it all peace now, mamma?'

But the face became sad and troubled, as she whispered :

'I hope there will be peace soon—but if it should not be! Hope, do you think He will accept me? you think He won't cast me away?'

'No, dearest mamma, no. "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."''

'But if I haven't come properly? if I haven't repented enough?'

'The repentance that God wants for your doubts before, is that you should doubt Him no longer,' Hope gently said. 'Listen, mamma—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" and, "if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful."''

At these last words, a restful look stole over the small features — Hope remarked to herself that it was the first time she had seen anything like real calm on her mother-in-law's countenance. She looked up at the face bending over her, with a faint smile, murmuring :

'Kiss me, darling—"He abideth faithful."''

The next moment, a gentle sigh and the loosening of the clasp of her hands told of the spirit's flight. The prayers for her had not been unavailing; at evening time it *had been* light.

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On the afternoon of the following Saturday, she was laid in her grave ; and on Monday Lionel went back to London, and the four children returned from Badgery Court. When Easter week came, Hope went to Avenham Vicarage for a couple of days. She was feeling the reaction, after a long time of hard work and anxiety ; she missed the fondness which her mother-in-law had always shown her, although it had been rather inconvenient at times ; and the proofs of it, in what had been left her from among the few jewels and articles of value that Mrs. Fenwick had retained in her poverty, touched her exceedingly with the memory of the kind, gentle friend who had from the first given her a daughter's place in her heart. All through Holy Week, she found her greatest solace in the daily services ; for, when at home, the consciousness that there was no invalid to need her care any longer was saddening, having been so long accustomed to be her mother-in-law's constant attendant. The doctor said she needed a little rest ; so Hope took her baby to Avenham, and there luxuriated in the delicious sense of having nothing to do, and in the special enjoyment of Arthur Wise's society, always a delight to her. When her visit came to an end, she was quite freshened up, and said she must not think of being idle again for a long time.

## CHAPTER XV.

THERE certainly was no chance of idleness for Hope when she was at home, for Maggie and Milford were growing fast, and their garments seemed to want letting down every week, their mother laughingly said. Moreover, as the Cotstone people improved—or, at all events, began more to desire instruction—their clergyman was all alive to supply their wants, and services and classes were multiplied, and in many of these Hope was required to take a share. This, indeed, quite fell in with her own inclinations, for she wished to be associated with her husband in his parish-work as much as possible, which was also his desire; but to find time was not so easy. However, she did manage it in some wonderful way, which would have excited more astonishment in her family had they not been used by this time to expecting Hope to find time and strength to do everything that was required of her. But it was not accomplished without effort and self-denial; although none—perhaps not even her husband—guessed this, from the quiet and often cheerful way in which she undertook most of her tasks.

Though the death of her poor mother-in-law relieved her of some of her labours, she substituted for them others of a different kind; for the expenses of Mrs. Fenwick's illness had been so serious, that Hope determined to try and make some money by painting, as she had before done; and, by dint of working hard in the light summer mornings, she succeeded. But, although what she got for her drawings paid off most of the expenses that had been weighing so heavily on them, there was no real change for the better. The next winter was a very severe one; there was great distress in the parish, which the Fenwicks laboured to relieve to the utmost of their power, living themselves as plainly as the poor people; and with New Year's Day came a second edition of twins—both girls this time.

'Those poor Fenwicks! I can't imagine how they get on at all,' remarked a neighbouring clergyman's wife in compassionate tones to a visitor. 'Seven children, and the eldest not six yet! She is a dear little thing, and quite a little mother already to the younger ones; but they are all really more or less babies. As to Mrs. Fenwick, she is simply wonderful; herself and the house and children always as neat as possible, whenever I have been there; and with only one maid to help her. She's a very sweet person; but I'm sorry for her, poor thing, for she's very young to have all this trouble.'

The 'poor thing' in question was at this moment setting out with all her tribe, except the two new babies,



who were now nearly two months old. Ursula had gone to stay for a week with her friends at Foxley, and no one was sorry to be rid of her presence for a time. So Hope started with her flock ; Bobby and Georgie and Frank—popularly designated as ‘the babies and the little baby’—being packed into a roomy wicker-work double perambulator, a present from Mrs. Wise some time before, from whence the twins occasionally emerged for a run. This afternoon, having borrowed a donkey from one of the villagers, the little party was bound for a wood, where dry sticks were to be gathered in abundance ; for, without such help to their stock of firing, they were obliged to exist with only the kitchen fire—the price of coals having risen very high during the severe weather.

As the little procession went along the lanes, a stranger would not have thought Hope looked a very fit subject for pity, as she walked briskly along, laughing and talking with her children, and occasionally stopping to frolic with the two elder ones, or climb the bank to get some hedgerow treasure which they could not reach. Her happily constituted nature, so full of elasticity, enabled her to throw off the burden of her household cares, when they did not immediately press on her, and give herself up to whatever was the special enjoyment of the moment ; and, also, it was always her principle to be bright with her little ones, and to enter into whatever interested them.

The wood was reached in time ; Maggie and Milford departed with shouts to gather sticks, and Bob and

Georgie began to clamour to be released from their chariot; so Hope turned them out to play about, while she herself collected all the wood in the vicinity of the perambulator. The twins' stout legs soon carried them away from her; but every now and then they came scrambling back, each lugging a great stick, which they threw down beside their mother, and then looked up, laughing and crowing with delight.

The wood covered the side of a hill, and, by-and-by, when Hope had collected all the sticks round her, and the twins had thrown themselves down on the ground beside the perambulator, rather tired with stumping about for half-an-hour, she called to Maggie and Milford, who were to be seen between the tree-stems, some distance off:

'Children, we are going up to the top of the hill. Come up there when you have finished, and leave your wood here.'

'All right, mother.'

Hope popped the twins into the perambulator again, and wheeled it up the hillside. The wood came to an end before they reached the top, and they emerged on to the withered heather and bracken and short grass which clothed nearly all the hills round Cotstone. Arrived at the summit, Hope released Bob and Georgie again, and seated herself on a gray boulder. It was not too cold for sitting out; for the severe weather had broken up a week or two before, and now there was only sufficient frost to give a pleasant crispness to the atmosphere—while the sun, at the end of February,

was strong enough to give real warmth, still early in the afternoon as it was. It had been perfectly still down in the valley ; but on the hill-tops there was always some breeze blowing, though to-day it was very slight ; only just stirring the folds of Hope's dress and rustling the dead fern round her.

From where she sat, her eye wandered beyond the nearer hills around her to a more distant and bluer range which was visible in one quarter. Those were the Quantocks, and Badgery and Avenham were over there. Her thoughts dwelt for some time with the friends at both places, and on the incidents in her past life connected with them—and then she turned to look more to the left, where, between an opening in the hills, she knew a view of the sea was to be obtained. Yes—there it was, of course ! looking blue and quiet, though without the sparkling radiance of a summer's day ; and the opposite coast showing faint, but distinct. It was not very far off, and Hope felt sure that it was a sea-breeze that fanned her cheek ; but that might have been imagination. She gazed long in this direction ; but at last her eyes came back to the narrow valley below her, where nestled the village—the square, gray church tower looking solid and venerable against the dark green of the surrounding yews ; and, close by, the church farm, with its comfortable, old-fashioned dwelling-house and farm-buildings, their roofs covered with moss and lichens of a growth of many years ; while the substantial straw and hay stacks standing round gave an air of comfort and plenty to the scene. The air was

so clear, that, looking down upon the farmyard, Hope could see the moving dark and light-coloured spots, which she knew were Farmer Blake's pigs, burying themselves in the straw, and felt a strong desire to do what looked quite feasible—throw a stone down on one of them.

Below the sloping churchyard ran the brown road, and on the other side of this, from among the great elms and oaks that shut it in, peeped forth the weather-stained roof of the Vicarage, with its irregular chimneys, from only one of which a thin blue streak of smoke was rising. This last sight was the only one that saddened Hope, as she thought of the bare grates in the other rooms, and of her husband coming in from his long walk to a cold house and scanty meal. However, the sight of the little white cottages round, with—in some instances—*no* smoke rising from the thatched roofs, reminded her that they were not alone in their poverty; and as she looked at the great brown and dull green hills—or rather mountains—that rose all round, there came almost unconsciously to her mind words she had heard in church the day before, and which always seemed peculiarly applicable to the dwellers at Cotstone :

‘The hills stand about Jerusalem ;  
Even so standeth the Lord round about His people,  
From this time forth for evermore.’

It was a very peaceful, soothing day—the quiet winter sky looked placidly down on everything ; and the crowing of cocks and bark of the sheep-dog from the field

far down below, where he could be seen collecting the flock into a corner, came up to the hill-top; while a flight of rooks passed overhead—the ‘whish’ of their wings distinctly audible as they flapped their way steadily homewards, and, turning their heads from side to side, uttered their grave, monotonous ‘caw.’ Just at Hope’s feet, the melted hoar-frost strung pearly drops on the short grass and dry heather; and, a few yards off, a rabbit popped out of his hole, and after sitting up on his haunches for a minute, surveying the prospect, darted away through the bracken.

So absorbed was Hope in all this, and in her own thoughts, that she was startled when a little hand was laid on her arm, and she found Maggie standing beside her.

‘Why, Maggie dear, I never heard you come up! you are such a quiet little mouse. Where’s Mil?’

‘He’s coming up. It’s nice here, mother.’

‘Yes. Are you tired, pussy?’ as the child climbed on her mother’s knee.

‘No. We’ve got a lot of wood, mother.’

‘That’s good chicks. We must be going home soon.’

‘Oh, let’s stay here a bit! Here comes Milford,’ as that young gentleman came stumping up the hill, and, after stopping to tickle the twins with a bit of fern, threw himself on his mother from behind and hung over her shoulder. And then the twins came, and tried to scramble into her lap—whereupon Hope began to tickle the whole lot of them; and, finally, she and the

children all rolled off the rock on to the grass, while their merry laughter echoed among the hills.

‘There’s a bunny!’ exclaimed Maggie, as she scrambled to her feet.

‘So there is!’ and Milford rushed off into the bracken in hot pursuit of the rabbit, followed by Maggie, and then by the twins, who, hand-in-hand, went scrambling along together; but were pursued by their mother and carried back, one under each arm, kicking and laughing. They were a most good-humoured little pair—never put out, and only giving trouble from their strong propensity to do everything that was most destructive to their garments.

Presently the other two rabbit-hunters came back, panting and glowing with the excitement of the chase; and then the whole party descended the hill. Having loaded the donkey, which had been left tethered in the wood, they went down to the road—the children leading their beast of burden, and Hope wheeling the perambulator.

They were nearing the village when the sound of horse’s hoofs behind caused her to look round, as a gentleman returning from hunting approached, and she drew off her flock to the side of the road. As he passed he turned and rather hesitatingly raised his hat, and Hope, looking up, recognised to her astonishment Sir Hugh Wilton—her partner on the evening of the dinner-party at Storr House, when she was there as a bride, nearly seven years before.

So surprised was she that she only half-bowed in

return, while the colour rushed to her cheek at the thought of the poverty that was revealed by the fire-wood they were conveying home, and the generally shabby appearance of herself and her children ; but he passed on without checking his horse, and she was left to the thoughts and recollections which had been called forth by this unexpected sight of an acquaintance of former years.

The whole of that evening's scene came back to her mind : her conversation with Sir Hugh, and how, herself in the first bright flush of youthful love and happiness, she had tried to put the great realities of Life and Death before her companion, thereby impressing them still more strongly on her own mind. She could almost fancy herself singing again ' He was despised,' while that great drawing-room grew more and more quiet, and Sir Hugh's grave look at the time, and half-careless tone afterwards. How long ago it seemed since that night ! She could see her mother-in-law's small, graceful figure, in the rich costume she remembered, moving about among the brilliant throng : and now all that was mortal of her lay in the little churchyard they were approaching. Walter's bright, keen face, as she recollected it, had grown graver and rather careworn ; and she herself was changed, she knew.

' All flesh is as grass ;

And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.'

The words came unbidden to her mind ; but their sad and solemn meaning was soon followed by the grand assurance that, though ' the grass withereth, and the

flower thereof falleth away,' yet 'the word of the Lord endureth for ever.'

'Yes,' said Hope to herself; 'it has endured all these years; it has never failed us when we just trusted it. And, as it shall endure *for ever*, surely it's no great thing to ask of us that, through this "little while," we should "endure as seeing Him Who is invisible."'

She and Walter speculated as to where Sir Hugh might be staying, and whether they would see any more of him. The next Sunday, after morning service, Walter said:

'I saw Wilton in church this morning, Hope—did you?'

'No! was he there really? are you sure, Walter?'

'Quite; I know him well enough; he was right at the back, close to the font. I didn't discover him till the sermon; I thought he seemed very attentive.'

'I wonder where he is staying, and whether he has grown more serious? I have never forgotten him—he took my fancy so much.'

'I know that. You talked such a lot about him after that evening, that I began to be quite anxious to get you away from his neighbourhood,' said her husband, looking very malicious.

'Walter! how can you be so wicked? I should have thought in all these years you would have learnt to conduct yourself better!' Hope replied, laughingly scolding him. 'You know, you yourself agreed that he was very attractive—so open and unconventional.'

'Yes. Well, I hope he will call, as I know it would



be a pleasure to you—and I like him very much ; but if he has changed, I think he might very likely be shy of seeing one. Now then, Bobby, keep your feet still, and take your fingers out of your plate.'

Hope looked out for Sir Hugh that evening in church ; but he was not there, and she decided that he was not going to take any further notice of them—till one afternoon towards the end of the week, when a ring at the bell having announced a visitor, Hannah presently appeared in the dining-room, where Hope was at work among the swarm of children, saying :

' Sir Hugh Wilton, please, ma'am.'

' Oh !' exclaimed Hope, her cheek flushing. She rose, and, laying down her work, took off her apron, and then ran hastily upstairs to brush her hair before descending to the drawing-room.

When she entered, Sir Hugh was looking at a portrait in crayons of herself with Maggie when a baby in her arms, which hung over the piano. Mrs. Fenwick had had it done, and it was one of the few pictures she had brought with her to Cotstone. It represented Hope exactly as he remembered her—a fair, gentle, happy girl, whose very look was an indication of the bright, loving spirit within. Now, when she appeared in the room, he was at first struck with the change in her appearance. The soft, round curve of her cheek was altered, and there were lines on the once smooth, white brow and about the hazel eyes ; and he noticed that the bones and veins were clearly visible in the little hand she held out to him. There was a certain look of toil about her

general appearance that was quite new to him, and which he did not like to see.

Yet Hope was not so much changed as at first sight he imagined. Her face was thin, indeed, and when the first flush of welcome had died away, without the fresh colour of former years; but her complexion was as clear and fair as ever—her eyes without a trace of dimness, but beaming with their old soft light—and her figure just as easy and graceful; while the look of peculiar quiet happiness and sweet thoughtfulness, which had always been her chief characteristic and charm, was still more noticeable now. She greeted Sir Hugh cordially.

‘I must apologize,’ she said, smiling, ‘for the way in which I behaved the other day when you passed; but the fact was, I was so surprised to see you in these parts that I forgot my manners.’

He laughed. ‘Don’t mention it! I was doubtful if I should make myself known to you.’

‘I wonder you knew it was I—coming from behind.’

‘Well, you see, I knew you were at Cotstone; so when I saw a lady close to the village, I thought it must be you.’

‘Are you staying near here?’ Hope asked. ‘My husband thought he saw you in our church on Sunday morning.’

Sir Hugh looked a little confused.

‘I have been in Devonshire, and came for ten days to my friend Captain Palmer, on my way home,’ he answered. ‘Yes; I walked over here on Sunday

morning; I used to know the place in Richardson's time, and wanted to see what it was like now. It is different.'

'I suppose so. There is certainly a change from when we first came; but there is still much to do—the evil seems to have been so deeply rooted.'

'It couldn't be anything else, after the years that fellow was here; but your husband would do a good work anywhere—and you too, I expect.'

Hope coloured and smiled, and then inquired after Lady Wilton, and what Storr House was like under its present owners. Sir Hugh imparted news of the neighbourhood, and then asked:

'Is Miss Fenwick at home?'

'I'm sorry to say she's not; she is staying with some friends in the neighbourhood. I am sure she will be sorry to have missed you.'

'The boys are getting on well, I hope. Are they at school?'

'No. Lionel has been for the last year in London—he is now a *man*,' Hope replied, with a smile—'and Bernard joined him a month ago. They are not at the same work, but they lodge together, which is a good thing for both. Poor boys! their present life is a great contrast to what they were accustomed to look forward to; but they are very good about it. Lionel is a very fine fellow.'

'And Miss Ursula is not good, I know,' Sir Hugh said to himself. 'Poor Mrs. Fenwick's illness must have been very trying,' he continued aloud.

‘Yes, it was. I don’t think she ever recovered the shock, you know, and she was a sort of invalid from the time she came here. One can’t help missing her—she was so kind and affectionate, and a help to me with the children in some ways.’

‘Were all those your children that I saw with you?’ Sir Hugh asked.

‘Oh yes; and there were two more at home!’ Hope answered, laughing.

‘You don’t mean it! Why, I thought there were about a dozen that day! How many have you, Mrs. Fenwick?’

‘Seven,’ Hope said. ‘There are two sets of twins.’

Sir Hugh gave a sort of gasp, at which Hope laughed—just the same clear, rippling laugh that he had heard the evening they first met.

‘How things have changed since we met at Storr House that evening!’ he observed. ‘I have four children now, and then I had only one small creature; and to think of you with seven!’

‘Yes; it seems a long time ago. We were both in our May-time then.’

‘Yes; and you wouldn’t enjoy yours, and wanted to keep me from enjoying mine!’ Sir Hugh said, smiling.

‘I beg your pardon—I enjoyed the May-days of my life exceedingly.’

‘Yes, I didn’t really mean that. And it’s evident you have something better than my old fatalist idea, or you wouldn’t look so bright now, when I expect you have found out that “Oh, it is not always May!”’

The change from the perfectly serious manner in which he had been speaking to the look and tone of comic sentiment, as he repeated this line of poetry, was very amusing, and caused Hope to laugh heartily.

‘You are right,’ she replied. ‘Right in supposing that I have found out that it isn’t always May, by any means, and also that it isn’t being a fatalist that makes me accept the fact cheerfully.’

‘Well, I’m sure you are right. I’m not so much of a fatalist as I used to be, you will be glad to hear.’

‘I am—very glad.’

‘It’s very kind of you to take any interest in me, I’m sure. I haven’t renounced the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, though, you must know.’

‘That’s a very serious confession to make—more serious than you seem to think,’ Hope observed gravely. ‘I suppose you know that you are breaking a very solemn promise you have made?’

‘You mean when I was baptized?’

‘Yes; your Baptismal vow was about this very thing, and at your Confirmation you confirmed it, which makes it all the stronger. We would not break our word to a man, but I’m afraid we constantly break our word to God, and think very little of it, moreover.’

‘Ah, Mrs. Fenwick, you are not any more tender-hearted than when you first gave me that wiggling which I’ve never forgotten!’ exclaimed Sir Hugh, laughing; and yet it was evident that he was not at all offended by Hope’s plain speaking. ‘I shouldn’t like to have you for my mother confessor!’

‘You may turn it into a joke if you like,’ Hope answered, laughing somewhat herself, ‘but it doesn’t make it any less real, you know.’

Sir Hugh remained silent for a moment, and then rose to go, saying :

‘Well, as I say, I’ve never forgotten all that you said, and what you sang too, that evening ; in fact, I have very often thought about it.’

‘Isn’t seven years rather a long time to go on thinking about a thing of that kind, without coming to any decision?’ Hope asked gently, but seriously, and with her steady gaze on the frank, manly face above her. Sir Hugh still looked so boyish, so like what she remembered him, and was as outspoken, as simple and straightforward in words and manner as ever, that she felt almost as if she might be talking to a younger brother or cousin. His cheek flushed rather, at this last question, and he turned from Hope’s gaze.

‘Yes, I suppose it is,’ he answered, half-laughing, in rather an uneasy manner. ‘I must go now — I’m afraid I have trespassed too long on your time already ; but I couldn’t resist giving myself the pleasure of calling on you.’

‘It was very kind of you, and I am so glad to have seen you,’ Hope answered warmly. ‘I wish my husband had been in.’

‘So do I. Remember me to him, please, and to Miss Fenwick. Couldn’t you come and stay with us some day? I know it would be a pleasure to my wife, as well as myself.’

‘Thank you very much—we should like it exceedingly; but I don’t know—my husband can very seldom leave his duty, and it is always rather difficult to get away from home.’

‘Well, if you could this summer, we should be only too pleased to see you at Hartingden. And, by-the-bye, Mrs. Fenwick, would you accept this small offering for any of your parochial charities? I know it will be made good use of here.’ He put into her hand a cheque for ten pounds.

Hope could not refuse; she looked her fervent thanks, coupled with half-reluctance to take the gift.

‘My eldest boy might have been killed in an accident the other day, while I was down here,’ Sir Hugh said, hurriedly, ‘and I thought I should like to make a—thank-offering of some kind; and I would as soon it should be here as anywhere. Good-bye.’ And giving Hope’s hand a squeeze that nearly annihilated it, he hurried out of the room, leaving her gazing at the cheque, still in a state of half-bewilderment.

It was a surprise to Walter when he came in, and he was equally touched and delighted; but both he and his wife agreed that a long journey north was quite out of the question.

‘We must be content to stop by “our ain fireside,” Hope,’ said he, smiling.

‘Oh, Walter! what cruel irony!’ she exclaimed. ‘At least, you need not mock our poverty with an expression so suggestive of comfort!’ But though she scolded

him, she was smiling, and he saw that there was no great harm done.

‘And Sir Hugh was so nice,’ she continued. ‘Yes, you may laugh, Walter; but he really is very attractive. It quite amuses me, the way he talks to me and lets me talk to him. I found myself speaking just as I might to Lionel.’

‘Well, I dare say you did him good.’

‘He is certainly more serious than he was, and I do hope he will soon really decide. He must have some nice feeling to give that thank-offering, entirely of his own accord.’

Ursula returned the next day, and found them in a very cheerful state, on the strength of the ten pounds.

‘Hope,’ she began, almost directly after she had got into the house, ‘the Comptons want me to go to them next week. They will have a large party in the house, and I shall want another evening dress.’

‘Oh!’ said Hope gravely. ‘You have accepted the invitation, then?’

‘I should think I had! It will be jolly fun; they are going to have theatricals one night, and all sorts of other nice things as well. Lord Dunchester will be there.’

Hope’s look grew still graver.

‘When are you going?’ she asked.

‘On Tuesday.’

‘Will they send for you?’

‘No; they didn’t say anything about it.’

‘Well, I think you must pay for your journey out of the money you have,’ Hope said. ‘When you accept



invitations entirely on your own account, you can hardly expect us to bear the expense. And I don't know where another dress is coming from, Ursula.'

'I must have one, Hope. I can't appear at a regular grand dinner in the shabby little thing I've got.'

'Poor people who can't afford to buy dinner-dresses ought not to go where they are obliged to have them—especially when the paying falls on others,' Hope answered severely.

Ursula began to feel rather ashamed of herself.

'Well, certainly I can't afford to buy one; so I suppose I must do without. Go to Merewood I must.'

Hope said no more; but meeting her sister that evening on the stairs, she began;

'Ursula, I've been thinking about your dress, and if you'll let me have your present one, I think I could make it look nicer.'

'Why, what can you do to it?' the girl asked, more gruffly than usual, because her sister's kindness made her feel ashamed of herself.

'You'll see,' Hope answered, smiling, and trying to appear as if it were a joke. Ursula went to fetch the black grenadine; and on the Monday Hope displayed it to her, looking quite different, tastefully trimmed with some fine black lace and knots of ribbon.

'Why, you have made it look nice!—but where did all that lace come from?'

'It is my own,' Hope answered quietly. 'And please, Ursula, will you try and not get it torn? for it was my mother's; and it's real, besides.'

‘Well, it’s very good of you to have put it on my dress,’ said Ursula, really touched and grateful. ‘Thank you very much, Hope. Yes, I’ll take care of it.’

Hope felt quite rewarded for the self-denial in more than one way which the trimming of this dress had cost her, by these few pleasant words from her sister-in-law, but she was uneasy about Ursula’s increasing friendship with these Comptons—very fast, worldly people—and especially with this young Lord Dunchester, who was constantly at Merewood Park, and of whom report did not speak very favourably. But, of course, neither she nor Walter had any control over the girl, and the least remonstrance about her acquaintances was so much resented that it seemed to do more harm than good.

Ursula’s friends sent her back to Cotstone in their carriage, when her visit was over, and she came rushing into the dining-room, where Hope was at work and rocking the cradle.

‘Well, Hope, here’s news for you! I’m engaged to be married! Guess who it is!’

‘Engaged! that is nice for you! To one of the young Comptons?’ Hope asked, rather hesitatingly, her mind misgiving her that it was really some one else.

‘No, indeed! some one much better.’

‘Not Lord Dunchester? Oh, Ursula!’ as the girl nodded.

‘That’s it. What are you pulling that long face for?’

‘Oh, Ursula, I’m so sorry! I wish you hadn’t.’

‘There’s a nice speech! But I have, though; and if it isn’t just splendid!’

‘But you know what one has heard about his betting, and all that sort of thing, and that he’s utterly irreligious, and——’

‘Stop that, Hope! I won’t hear a word against him. He’s a dear, jolly fellow, and as handsome as Jupiter—that is, if Jupiter was handsome, which very likely he wasn’t.’

‘Do you really mean that you love this man?’ Hope asked in astonishment.

‘I should think I did! I’d go to the world’s end with him; and shan’t we be happy when we’re married, that’s all!’

‘Is anything settled about that?’

‘No; but I expect it will be soon. I don’t know how I shall live without seeing him; he’s gone away to-day.’

And Ursula departed to her room whistling, while Hope went to the study to communicate the startling news to her husband. He was much distressed—even more than she was.

‘She has gone and engaged herself to the most worthless fellow!’ he exclaimed. ‘I wonder if it couldn’t have been prevented? Perhaps we have been careless, Hope.’

‘I don’t see what we could have done. She *would* go to Merewood, and of course one knows the sort of society she would be in there.’

Walter sighed.

‘She seems perfectly devoted to him,’ Hope went on. ‘Isn’t it strange how a person, seemingly almost without affection, should suddenly bestow quite a torrent on one individual?’

‘I don’t think it is very strange,’ Walter replied. ‘No one is without affection; there are depths in every heart, which may remain sealed for years, till suddenly a key is found to unlock them. It’s so with Ursula; but if only that Dunchester hadn’t been the one to find the key! Poor Ursula! I don’t believe he is capable of making any woman happy.’

‘I’m afraid we can’t do anything about it now; it seems quite settled.’

‘We can pray that God will prevent the marriage in some way or other,’ Walter answered.

‘Poor Ursula! how she would abuse us if she knew we were doing that! It seems almost unkind, for it would be such a blow to her if the engagement were broken off; and when I think of the happiness of our first love ——’ Hope said, looking at her husband with an affectionate smile, and a pretty colour coming to her cheek.

‘But, my dear Hope, if God answered our prayer by opening her eyes to the truth, she would not think it unkind of us to have prayed for it.’

‘But suppose Lord Dunchester died, or anything of that sort.’

‘When we lay a petition before God, Hope, we mustn’t choose the way in which He shall answer it. He chooses, and His way is the best,’ her husband

replied gravely, and she acknowledged that he was right.

Ursula's engagement weighed on her elder brother's mind very heavily—although no definite time was yet fixed for the wedding, much to her disgust—also one or two trying events took place in the parish; and, as the summer came on, he began to suffer from severe headaches and loss of energy, which caused Hope some anxiety. The doctor said he needed rest and a complete change; but neither of these could be had without money, and there was often not enough of this for the bare necessities of life.

'How can I get just enough money to take him away for even a fortnight?' was the problem with which Hope's mind was busy, as she sat in the verandah one close July evening, stitching away; while in a low garden-chair reclined her husband, his eyes closed and a drawn look on his brow, showing that the headache was severe. But she could not solve it satisfactorily, and had to fall back on the old assurance—'Our Heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things.'

That this was not merely a pleasing fancy, but a most blessed reality, was proved most clearly, she considered, two days later, when Walter received a pressing invitation from a former fellow-curate, whom he had not seen for several years, but with whom he had always maintained a correspondence, to join him in a walking-tour through the Lake district—his friend insisting on defraying all the expenses. Reluctant though the Fen-

wicks were to agree to this, the offer was too evidently an answer to prayer for them to think it right to refuse; and as Mr. Spencer was an unmarried man, with some private means, they did not need to hesitate on his account to allow him to 'frank' his friend on the expedition. The only question was how Cotstone was to be looked after in the Vicar's absence; but on talking to Mr. Wise about it, he suggested that a young nephew of his, who was preparing for Holy Orders, and wished to learn parochial work during the vacation, should come to Cotstone and undertake the visiting and classes, while an old clergyman in Duncombe would come for the Sunday duty.

So at the end of July young Mr. Herbert arrived—a pleasant youth of about two-and-twenty; and after he had been initiated by Walter into the work he would have to do, and laughingly told that he could always refer to the 'vicaress'—as Hope was denominated by her husband—the latter departed to join Mr. Spencer and proceed to the Lakes.

CHAPTER XVI.

‘How sweet, in that dark hour, to fall  
On bosoms waiting to receive  
Our sighs, and gently whisper all !  
They love us—will not God forgive ?’  
*Christian Year.*

AT Cotstone matters went on pretty much in their ordinary groove for the first part of Walter’s holiday. Mr. Herbert proved himself an efficient lay-helper, and he and Hope became great friends ; while the accounts received from her husband were most cheering and satisfactory. The fresh air of the hills and the freedom from care had wonderfully revived him, and he much enjoyed the society of his friend. At Buttermere they had fallen in with the Lesters, who were also in those parts, and had spent a week there, making expeditions together.

One evening, about a fortnight after Walter’s departure, Ursula went to Foxley to dine at her friends the Baileys’. Hope sent Hannah to bed, and sat up to admit her sister on her return. It was past eleven before the door-bell rang, and she rose from where she had been sitting by the open drawing-room window,

while the twin-babies slept peacefully in their cradle in a farther part of the room, and went to unfasten the house-door.

Ursula came quickly in, looking as if she hardly saw her sister, and with a strange expression on her face that startled Hope ; but she took no notice of it, and said pleasantly :

‘ Here you are ! You must have had a lovely drive home.’

‘ Yes,’ answered the girl shortly.

‘ Was it a pleasant party ?’—but Ursula seemed not to hear the question, and went upstairs. Having fetched the cradle from the drawing-room, Hope followed her, wondering what had gone wrong ; for it was evident from her look and manner that something had happened.

‘ Lord Dunchester isn’t in these parts,’ she said to herself—‘ at least, as far as I know ; and if she had met him unexpectedly, it would have a very different effect from this on her. I think some one must have told her something bad about him, and that’s why she looks so fierce. Poor girl !’

The next morning, Ursula vanished directly after breakfast and did not appear again till dinner-time, when she came in, looking very hot ; and Hope discovered that she had been to Duncombe, but for what purpose did not transpire. Nothing happened for the next two days. She was moody and fractious, with a worried and at times wrathful expression in her roving dark eyes ; but, to any gentle inquiry from



her sister, she only answered roughly that she was quite well, and desired to be left alone, which Hope had sufficient tact to do.

It was two mornings after her mysterious visit to Duncombe, that breakfast was over at the Vicarage and the post had just come in. Mr. Herbert had left the dining-room, and Hope was reading a letter from Lionel, when she was startled by an exclamation from Ursula, who had also received a letter; and, looking up, she saw her eyes flashing, and her whole countenance full of strong indignation.

‘So he has done it! How could he? Cruel! mean! wicked!’

‘What has happened, Ursula?’ Hope asked gently.

‘He has betrayed me! he has thrown me over! the coward!’

‘Not Lord Dunchester!’ Hope exclaimed.

‘Yes, he has! Only hear what he has done!’

‘We had better go into the drawing-room,’ Hope said quietly. ‘Anyone may be coming in here, and you don’t want all the world to hear this, I should think.’

Ursula followed her into the drawing-room, and then began.

‘Well, when I was at Foxley the other night, we were out in the garden, and I was by the syringa hedge, waiting for Florence, who had gone to get a shawl. And then I heard two ladies—who were staying in the house and whom I didn’t know—talking on the other

side, and I caught Dunchester's name; and one of them said:

"You know he is engaged to a young lady up in Scotland—a great beauty?" So the other answered:

"But I thought he was already engaged to a girl down here—a Miss Fen something or other?"

"Oh! but that was soon broken off, I think," says the other creature; "and, at any rate, this must be true, for I heard it from him the other day. I think he can only have been amusing himself with the poor girl, whoever she was, down here; for he has been making love to this young beauty for some time. It's not the first time he has done such a thing, you know." They went on talking; but I had heard quite enough, and you may imagine the sort of state I was in. I didn't really believe it—I wouldn't.'

'And is it true?' Hope asked, as Ursula paused.

'Well, the next morning I wrote to him, and rushed off to Duncombe to post it. I didn't write angrily, but just to ask, and begged him to say it wasn't true. But it is, Hope!' the girl continued passionately. 'He has jilted me, for the sake of this beauty; and it's my belief that he has never cared for me, and that he was half-engaged to her all the time! Just read his letter!'

She flung the letter across to Hope, and walked rapidly about the room while her sister read it. It was a cold, unfeeling production, briefly saying that he had been on the point of writing himself to Miss Fenwick, to inform her of the engagement he had recently

contracted with a young lady in Scotland. (He was prudent enough not to disclose her name.) He had known her for some time, and, on coming into her society again, had discovered that his affections were really given to her. He was sorry Miss Fenwick should have heard of it so abruptly; but very probably she had some one else to console herself with, and, anyhow, their intercourse of the last few months had been an amusement for which they ought to be grateful. All means were lawful to procure this; and, of course, Miss Fenwick knew as well as he did, that the game of love was always a game of chance.

Hope's colour mounted, and she pressed her lips tightly together, as she read the letter; when she had finished, she looked up, and Ursula read her indignation in her face.

'I never read such a thing!' she exclaimed. 'It's shameful! And then the cool, careless way in which he writes, as if it was only a game!'

'Treating the whole thing as just a passing amusement, when he knows what it has been to me!' Ursula responded vehemently.

'He is a disgrace to manhood,' Hope said. 'I didn't believe such a heartless wretch could exist. Oh, Ursula, you have had an escape!'

'Don't talk to me of that!' she exclaimed, suddenly changing her tone. 'Oh, I loved him so, and was so happy in thinking he loved me—and now it's all gone! No, it's not an escape—it's a loss; such a loss!'

'Yes, I forgot how you would feel it, when I said

that,' Hope answered, touched by the sad tone of Ursula's voice. 'I am very sorry for you.'

'And I loved him so for loving me, although I was ugly and all that sort of thing,' the girl burst out again; 'and to think that all the time he was only just amusing himself with me! How could he? how could he? But, oh! I do love him so still! I can't help it; and yet he doesn't care a straw for me! I'm just as much without love as I was before.'

'Poor girl! it is a blow to you. But, Ursula dear, you want love—you are craving for it; take the love of Jesus, do! which He is ready to give you now; it will satisfy you.'

'Hope, don't!' vehemently exclaimed Ursula. 'How can you begin talking religion to me now? And it only shows how little you understand, to think that any other love can ever be the same to me as his!' And there-with she darted out of the room and upstairs, and Hope heard her lock her door behind her.

'Was it ill-timed to speak of God's love to her now?' Hope questioned with herself. 'I thought a blow like this would perhaps incline her to turn to Him—and if it only hardens her! But perhaps, after she has got over the first shock, she will feel that she wants something to fill up the blank. I must be very wise and patient with her.'

Ursula remained in her room the whole day; and when, at dinner-time, Hope went to her door to ask if she would come down, she was answered by a 'No, thank you'—gruff, indeed, but with a gruffness that

so evidently came from deep misery, that she longed to try and comfort the poor girl. But she wisely refrained from forcing sympathy, if it was not sought ; and she only prayed and waited.

In the evening, when it was growing dusk, she came out into the veranda for a little fresh air, after putting the younger children to bed, and there found Ursula wandering up and down with her hands behind her back. When Hope appeared, she pulled up, and stood leaning against one of the pillars, looking at her with a sort of hungry, wistful expression in her eyes, that were red and heavy as if from constant crying.

‘Have you come out for some air?’ Hope asked gently. ‘You have had nothing to eat all day ; wouldn’t you like a cup of tea?’

‘No, thank you ; I’ll wait till supper. I haven’t wanted anything.’

‘No ; but you will if you go on too long like this. Your face looks very hot. Does your head ache?’

‘Not exactly. I don’t want anything, thank you, Hope.’

The tone was much gentler than Ursula’s usual one ; and Hope, standing by her, presently ventured to take one of the girl’s hands in her own and stroke it gently. Ursula did not draw it away ; but neither spoke, till suddenly there came a great sob, and she turned and leant her head against the pillar, every feature quivering with grief. Presently she exclaimed :

‘I think I shall go wild! It’s too hard—I can’t bear it!’

For a moment there was no answer, and then Hope only repeated softly the words :

‘“Surely *He* hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”’

Ursula’s reply was a fresh burst of tears ; and then she suddenly turned to Hope, and, taking both her hands in hers, exclaimed between her sobs :

‘Oh, Hope, I can’t live without love, now that I’ve once known what it was! No one ever loved me till he did—and I suppose he didn’t really, but I thought he did. Do you think you could love me a little? I know I’ve no right to ask it of you, after I’ve been such a—— but if you would, just a little bit.’

Instantly the loving heart threw open its gates. Hope put her arms round Ursula, who laid her head down on her sister’s shoulder.

‘Of course I will, dear. You shall have much more than a little bit of love. Oh, Ursula dear, I am so glad of this!’

Ursula clung to Hope all the rest of the evening : but she was persuaded by her to go to bed soon after supper ; for she could eat nothing and had a racking headache, and Mr. Herbert’s presence was rather embarrassing. When Hope herself came up to bed, she thought she would just go to Ursula’s room to see how she was now. She entered softly, shading the candle with her hand, hoping to find her asleep ; but the girl lay with wide-open, sleepless eyes, that raised

themselves to her sister's face with a terribly hopeless expression in them.

'Have you not been to sleep yet, dear?' inquired Hope, with her soft, cool hand stroking back the rough hair from the flushed, heated brow.

'No, I can't sleep a wink,' was the answer, with a groan. 'I shall go off my head soon, if things go on like this. I feel as if I was dried up.'

'Yes; you are getting quite feverish,' Hope said, feeling the hot hands. 'I will bring you something that will quiet you.'

She left the room, returning soon with the medicine, which Ursula took passively, and then allowed Hope to smooth the disordered bedclothes, the greater part of which had found their way on to the floor from her constant tossing about.

'There, you look more comfortable now. Good-night, dear; try to sleep.'

Hope pressed a kiss on Ursula's brow, which she returned warmly, and then said hesitatingly:

'Hope, just say what you repeated in the veranda this evening—that text, you know.'

It was the first time that any words of Scripture had appeared otherwise than exceedingly distasteful to Ursula, and it was with a feeling of strange gladness that Hope at once complied.

"'Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.'"

A husky 'Thank you' was all Ursula's reply; but as

soon as Hope had left the room, she buried her face in the pillows, sobbing :

‘ Oh, if only that could take any of the load off me ! But it’s for good people like Hope, and I feel wickeder than ever now. I’ll love Hope now—I’ll do anything for her ; but I shall never, never love God ! It’s too cruel to have sent me this !’

Thus the wild, ungovernable spirit raved on, till at last, wearied out with the excitement and misery of the day, she fell into a heavy sleep. Ah ! well was it for Ursula, as for us all, that there is a Love which, the more we revolt, yearns the more to reclaim, and which, when once felt, has power to melt the hardest heart.

Ursula had so far recovered herself the next day that she came down to meals and went about as usual ; but she looked utterly wretched, and the only time she seemed at all happy was in Hope’s presence ; and this enjoyment she could not often have, as her sister’s numerous avocations took her all over the house. Ursula was very anxious to be of some use ; but, in spite of the quantity of work to be done, it was rather difficult to find anything that she could do. She was equally ignorant of cooking and needlework, and she had been too long disagreeable to the children for them to be happy if left in her charge ; besides that, she had not the least idea how to manage them. So the best thing that Hope could do was to give her some of the sweeping and dusting, and let her take messages about the parish. Ursula seemed rather surprised and dis-



appointed that her new affection for Hope did not at once transform her into as useful a woman as her sister. The occupations she did find were not such as took off her mind from brooding on her own sorrow; and the consequence was, that after two days there was a sort of reaction, and she took to reading novels all day, greatly to Hope's distress, who ventured to suggest that she was not likely to find much comfort in them.

'I know that,' Ursula replied; 'but I want something that will take me out of myself.'

'Yes; but isn't it a pity only to be taken out of yourself into unreal, unnatural scenes?'

Ursula looked rather glum and did not reply, and Hope thought it better to leave her, believing that she would soon grow weary of novels in her present state of mind. She judged correctly; for at the end of a week Ursula threw down the book she had just finished, exclaiming:

'Oh, I can't read any more of this stuff! It doesn't take off my mind a bit from my trouble. Either the people marry happily—and that makes me so sore when I think what might have been for me—or they are parted in some way, and then I feel that it's just like me and Dunchester. I see him and think of him at every turn.'

'You want some one better to think about, don't you?' Hope said.

'There can't be anyone better to me,' Ursula replied quickly. 'I gave him every bit of heart I'd got, and I

can't take it back again in a hurry. I'm not a "light o' love," if he is.'

'But you see you can love some one else, even now, because you say you love me,' Hope observed.

'Of course I do! How could I help it, when, after I've always been such a bear to you, as soon as I'm unhappy you come comforting me, as if I'd been the most angelic creature? But you'll understand, Hope, because I love you, it doesn't make me care or think about Dunchester less. You can't make up to me for him, you know.'

'No, I think there is only One Who can really do that.'

'Yes, I know you mean God; but I don't see how you can possibly expect me to love Him, after He has sent me such a cruel blow as this.'

'Then you think He doesn't love you, because He has sent you this trouble?'

'I don't know. Of course, you say He loves one, and it's in the Bible, I believe; all I know is that I don't and can't love Him.'

'And, in spite of all this, *He loves you still*,' Hope answered earnestly. Ursula did not reply, and no more was said; but Hope did not know how, for two or three days after, those words rang in Ursula's ears: 'He loves you still.'

They were sitting together one afternoon, Hope mending and Ursula unpicking a frock, when she looked up and said quaintly:

'I think I feel rather better now, Hope.'

'I'm very glad,' her sister replied sincerely, though smiling a little.

'I think it must be true that God loves me. I've been looking in my Bible the last day or two, and I see there's such a lot about it; so I don't mean to think and say all the wicked things I have about Him. I shall try to love Him, too.'

'Isn't it rather queer *trying* to love a person?' Hope observed. 'It's generally supposed to be a spontaneous action; you either love decidedly, or you do not.'

'Yes, but it must be different with God; and, besides, I don't love Him now—I always feel that He has taken Dunchester away from me; but still, I know I ought to—and I think I should like to be different now. There's no more pleasure for me in life, and I don't suppose I shall ever be jolly again.'

'Then what good do you expect it to do you, if you become different?' Hope inquired.

'I shall have something better to think about—at least, I hope so. I can't care to go out again, and I'm sure all the world is horribly false, if he could behave in such a way. Oh, Hope!' she added, changing her tone, 'do you know, I *can't* make myself believe that it's really *my* Dunchester who has done this? It seems impossible that it could have been all a sham—I keep thinking it is a horrid dream.'

'Well, I suppose it was not exactly a sham. I dare say he cared for you for a time—as much as such a man could ever care for any girl; but I suppose, when he got away and saw some one else he liked

better, what love he had—only I hate to call it love—vanished away.'

'It was love, though, Hope! You don't know how kind and attentive he was to me, and always wanting to do what I liked. Oh, if only it was a dream, and I could wake up and find things as they were!'

'But you would not have known anything about God's love, if this blow had not come.'

'But I was quite happy then; I didn't want anything else.'

'Then, Ursula dear,' Hope answered gently, but very seriously, 'don't be surprised if you feel no more true peace and comfort than you have now. The world has gone wrong with you—everything looks flat just now—and so you think perhaps religion might do you good. It's soothing to say to yourself, "God loves me"—and you think it would be nice to love Him; at the same time, your feeling is, "If only I had my earthly love, I shouldn't want God's love a bit."' '

'Well, Hope, you are a queer creature. Apparently, you would much rather I didn't try to love God! when haven't you told me yourself that Christ wants people who are unhappy to come to Him?'

'So He does; but still He has His own terms. The people to whom He gives rest are those who come, wanting *Him* above everything else; they feel sure that nothing else can satisfy the craving of their souls. Now, you come—but it seems to me it is with the feeling, "Of course, I had much rather have Dunchester, and be as I was; but, as I can't, I dare say

Jesus is better than nothing." And as to coming to Him as your *Saviour*—coming to Him with your *sin*—I don't believe, Ursula, you have ever thought of that.'

'Well, all I know is, that I couldn't give up loving Dunchester if I tried ; and of course, if God won't have me like that, it's no use thinking about it. But I don't understand all this—only I want to have something besides him to think about ; and I thought you'd let me try to be useful in the parish—teach, and that sort of thing. I know I'm an idiot about these things ; but may I try ?'

'Yes, you can try, dear—at least, I don't suppose Walter will have any objection ; only, you know, we always want our people to be taught about their Saviour and about living for Him, and you will find it rather hard to do that if you know nothing about it yourself. Indeed, dear Ursula, I don't want to keep you away from God ; but I think you need to see what His love to you has been, and how, whether you have earthly love or not, you cannot do without *Him*—then you would be only anxious to know that you were His and He was yours.'

Ursula kissed her sister, saying, 'Thank you for trying to help me ; you are a dear, good thing !' but Hope could not tell how far she had taken the words to heart ; she herself considered that the change in the girl was of a most unsatisfactory nature, as far as it had gone at present. However, she thought that possibly the trying to teach and enlighten poor people might be the best way of showing her the darkness of her own soul :

so she began to give Ursula some bits of work in the way of going to read to the aged and bed-ridden people in the parish, some of whom lived at long distances in the scattered cottages; and she liked the long walks, from which Hope was glad to be relieved. She seemed to find her new occupation pleasant, and got on well with many of the people, especially the lads of the village, as she understood all their sports and was always at her ease with boys; while Hope, and Walter too, when he returned, continually rejoiced that the discord which she had hitherto caused in the family had been turned to harmony—on most points, at all events.

Now that Ursula's eyes had been opened to see the true worth of her brother and sister-in-law, she was not satisfied to go on living on their charity; and accordingly surprised Hope one day, about six months after the events just related, by beginning suddenly:

'Hope, do you think it would be possible for me to be a governess?'

'My dear Ursula, what sudden idea is this?'

'It isn't sudden. I don't like to go on living on you—I feel quite ashamed now of having done it all these years; and I ought to be able to support myself, at any rate, even if I could not do anything to help you. It would be a relief to have me off your hands, wouldn't it?'

'In the way of expense, of course it would be. It's very kind of you to think of it; and I don't wish to oppose it, because I think it is much better you should

be able to do something for yourself. You might not always have us to make a home for you.'

'Don't talk of that!' Ursula exclaimed. 'But you think I might try it?'

'I don't see why you should not; you had a first-rate education.'

'Ah, I didn't profit by that as I should—I am a perfect ignoramus as to music, you know. However, I have been reading, and that sort of thing, for the last three months, and I think I feel a little more capable of imparting knowledge to the infant mind than I did.'

'So that is the explanation of your having been so much shut up in your bedroom lately, you sly cat!' Hope said, laughing. 'But, really, Ursula, I commend you most heartily for your efforts; we will have a talk with Walter this evening about your looking out for a situation.'

The result of conversations and inquiries was that it was finally decided that Ursula should obtain a situation in London as daily governess, and should lodge with her two brothers, who would move into better apartments than they had been in hitherto. Bernard was rather disposed to get into unsettled ways, through the acquaintances he made; and it was thought that having his sister to make more of a home for him might be a help, while the living with them would prevent her from feeling so lonely in her new life. Ursula was very low at leaving Cotstone, and especially Hope, whom she now looked upon and treated as a sort of superior being.

‘Oh, Hope, I know I shall go to the bad altogether, when I am away from you!’ she exclaimed piteously, a few days before her departure. ‘You are the only creature who has ever done me any good.’

‘But I don’t think I can have done you much real good, if you are going wrong as soon as you are away from me,’ Hope answered quietly.

‘I don’t believe I shall ever be any different from what I am now. I don’t think anything will make me think about God as I ought.’

‘How do you think you ought to feel towards God?’

‘Why, I ought to love Him, you know. I ought to feel as you do—you like to do what He likes, although it may be something horrid; and you look upon Him as your Friend, and are always wanting to please Him, evidently. Now, I should like to feel as you do, but that’s because it would make me happy; I don’t care a bit really about pleasing God.’

Hope was silent, and presently Ursula went on:

‘And, really, I’m very glad to be giving up my Sunday class and other things, because I know I don’t do the people a bit of good, nor myself either.’

Hope still did not speak, so at last Ursula exclaimed:

‘Well, Hope, are you going to say nothing? What are you thinking about?’

‘I was wondering if you knew at all what keeps you back from giving yourself to God.’



‘Of course I do. I can’t give up Dunchester, as I’ve often told you.’

‘And you are content to let this hindrance remain, knowing that you can never be blessed while it does?’

‘I can’t help myself, Hope; it was too hard a blow for me ever to forget.’

‘My dear Ursula, did God ever ask you to forget? He never meant us to be stones.’

‘Well, go on, Hope; I’d be glad if you could make it clear for me.’

‘Very well. Now, what do you want God to do for you?’

‘I want Him to make me happy—to take away this horrid ache out of my heart, and give me rest.’

‘I don’t think God ever promises us separate gifts of peace, and happiness, and so on, *apart* from Himself. I think what you have done, and so many people do, is to be willing enough to take God’s *gifts*; but all the time you think of the *Giver* as ever so far off and quite removed from you, He is not a real Person to you at all.’

‘Quite true,’ sighed Ursula. ‘Go on.’

‘Now, what God really does, is to offer us *Himself*. Just as in marriage a wife gets her husband’s title, if he has one—his property, his home, his friends—they all become hers then; but it is because she has taken the *man* to be her husband, and they are now one; so, if we receive the Lord Jesus as He offers Himself to us, we do get peace, and joy, and strength, and all things that He has—but it is because we have taken

Him, and are now one with Him. Now, dear, wouldn't you like to have the Son of God as yours, and you to be His—in the same way, if I may say so, that you and Lord Dunchester would have been one, if you had been married—only in such a far, far higher and more blessed sense? Can you refuse Him when He offers Himself to you?

Tears rose to Ursula's eyes.

'Oh, Hope, I should like it, indeed! but, then, must I give up loving Dunchester? I can't have the two?'

'Not in the way that you have kept the thought of him hitherto, perhaps; but, dear Ursula, which do you think is the best to have—the sore memory of one who has only deceived and injured you, or the real, unchanging, eternal love of the Son of God Who died for you?—which is the best?'

Ursula did not reply at once; she knit her thick eyebrows, bit her lip and pinched her fingers.

'Oh, Hope!' she exclaimed at last, 'how you do drive me into a corner! what shall I do?'

'I think you know which is really the best,' Hope said gently. 'You would rather know now that you were one of Christ's own loved ones than be Lord Dunchester's wife, wouldn't you?'

Ursula's tears stole slowly down her cheek, and she bent her head, as if to conceal the signs in her face of the conflict going on within. At last, with a great effort, in a voice broken by sobs, she brought out the words:

'Yes—I would—I would rather belong to Christ—I

will be His. But, oh, oh, Dunchester!' and laying her head down on the table, she burst into a passion of tears. Hope came and sat by her, stroking the rough hair tenderly, and when Ursula's sobs had somewhat subsided, she said:

'You will find Him to be all you want, dear—make Him your friend. And He does not ask you to give up thinking about Lord Dunchester; only He will teach you to think about him rightly, and without that terrible, sore bitterness. I hardly think you can wish now—do you, dear?—to belong to one who you know is living for the world which crucified your Lord?'

'No, no,' murmured Ursula. 'I see now what God's love really means. If only Dunchester did! oh, I wish he could!'

'Well, dear, pray that he may; that is the way God would like you to think of him. Pray that he may see what you see now, and then we may trust that one day you shall meet again—united in Jesus Christ.'

Ursula's tears still flowed fast, but more quietly, as she rose and kissed her sister, saying:

'Thank you, dear Hope; I shall see it all better by-and-by than I do now—it is such a strange mixture of feelings at present;' and then she went to her room, and did not appear again for a long time. When she did, her face, though sad, had lost the weary, restless look it had worn so long. Hope noticed the change with thankful heart, but said nothing.

## CHAPTER XVII.

‘ Sweet toils, sweet cares, for ever gone.’

*Lyra Innocentium.*

URSULA and her brothers got on well together in London, although there were sometimes squabbles between Bernard and his sister; for, although now seriously endeavouring to do right, this did not alter her natural temper, which was not amiable — and Bernard’s rather fastidious disposition provoked her, as being so unlike her own. Lionel, however, generally acted the part of mediator successfully on these occasions: his word had immense weight with his young brother; and though in reality several years her junior, his manliness of mind and character and unusual good sense and right feeling made Ursula instinctively look upon him as the head, and defer to his judgment in most things.

As Christmas approached, the three were full of pleasurable excitement; for, immediately after Ursula’s arrival in London, they had laid their heads together and resolved to begin saving at once, in order to give Walter and Hope a really handsome present at Christ-

mas. Lionel had already more than once given what he could save in the year, but of course had never been able to rise to the magnificent sum of ten pounds, which their united efforts and self-denial produced by the end of the year. At first, they thought of buying something useful; but, after consultation, came to the conclusion that the money would really be the most acceptable, and Walter and Hope would know how best to use it. The latter were exceedingly touched by this proof of affection and gratitude from those for whom they had sacrificed so much—it came to brighten what was otherwise rather a melancholy Christmas; for a baby girl, who had been born in the end of November, two or three weeks after had been discovered to be blind, and this was a sore trial to the parents, especially to Hope. It seemed to cast somewhat of a shadow over her hitherto wonderful spirits, and the ‘grind,’ as Lionel called it, of incessant hard work and struggles to make both ends meet was not calculated to dispel this. ‘Patience’ was the name given by its parents to the baby. ‘She will have need of that, poor pet, when she gets older and begins to understand,’ Hope had said; ‘and the name will have its voice for us, too.’

There was a peculiarly deep tenderness in her ways with this little one; and though her countenance after a time lost the expression of deep melancholy which it had worn at first, after the baby’s blindness had been discovered, yet, whenever the little thing was in her sight, there was a look of wistful sadness on the

mother's face, which all who saw her remarked as never having been there before. Walter, too, always handled little Patience very gently, and his keen eyes grew soft when they were bent on her. It was evident that the parents had no light share in the heavy cross, of which their child was as yet unconscious. For the first two or three months after its birth, the baby was so delicate that it seemed doubtful if it would ever live to grow up; but after that time it became stronger, and, though Hope would perhaps hardly have grieved had it been taken from them before, without ever awaking to the knowledge of its sad loss, yet, now that it seemed likely to live, her friends observed that, tenderly and devotedly as she had cared for all her other children, to none had she ever seemed to cling so fondly as to this afflicted little one.

On the morning of Tuesday in Holy Week, Walter, coming in from church, met his wife in the hall.

'How is it that you weren't at church this morning, Hope?' he asked.

'I couldn't come; baby isn't well, and I had to be with her.'

'Baby not well!' he exclaimed.

'She's rather better now; but she was very restless all night, you know, and this morning she got very fretful and bad, poor little darling!'

'Are you going to have Dr. Bell to her?'

'No; I hope she will come round now. I shouldn't have him unless she got worse.'

'You don't think it's anything infectious?'

‘Oh no! there’s nothing about she could have caught. Don’t be frightened, Walter dear; I hope it’s not anything to signify.’

But, though she looked bravely up in his face, he saw that her lip quivered as she spoke.

‘Don’t put off getting Bell, if you think it is more than an ordinary ailment,’ Walter said, half-afraid lest his wife might be trusting rather too much to her former experience in the children’s hospital.

‘Do you think I would, Walter, if I thought so?’ she answered, with such passionate earnestness that he was quite startled, and replied soothingly:

‘No, dear—of course, you know what to do.’

But early the next morning, Walter was waked by a piteous burst of baby-crying, and saw Hope standing by the bed, with little Patience in her arms, and looking more frightened than he had ever seen her.

‘Walter, please go and call Hannah; and we must get Dr. Bell.’

‘Is she ill again?’ he asked, jumping up.

‘Yes. I’ve been up with her a long time—she’s been crying and moaning so; and now she seems in such pain.’

Walter hastily summoned Hannah, and soon appeared again, dressed. ‘I’m going off to Duncombe. How is she?’

‘Very bad,’ sorrowfully answered Hope, who was seated in the large white armchair, rocking the baby in her arms.

Her husband came and stood there a minute, looking

down at the small, pale face, with its sad vacant blue eyes, till Hope raised her head, exclaiming beseechingly:

‘Oh, Walter, please go at once! we mustn’t lose time.’

The fear in her face and words struck his heart with a foreboding dread; could it be that they were to lose this helpless little one, round whom their tenderest affections were so closely twined?

His long, rapid strides took him to Duncombe at the rate of nearly four miles an hour, and shortly before breakfast-time he returned with Dr. Bell in his gig. Maggie and Milford met them in the hall.

‘Baby got a little better after you left, father; but she’s dreadfully bad again now,’ the former said tearfully.

Her father made a sound between a groan and a sigh, and said to the doctor:

‘You had better come up at once.’

‘Is there anything I can do about, father?’ inquired Milford, his bright face unusually clouded.

‘I don’t know, my boy; I’ll see presently,’ replied Walter, and went upstairs.

Hope raised her head quickly as he and the doctor entered her room, but did not speak till the latter had looked at little Patience and asked some questions; and at last Walter ventured to inquire his opinion.

Yes, the baby was very ill, he said; but he thought that with great care it might be got round. And there were two things very much in its favour—the genial



spring weather and the fact that its mother was so skilled in the nursing and treatment of children. Before he left, the remedies he had administered seemed to have somewhat soothed the poor little thing ; and when Walter returned alone to his wife's room, she was looking rather less oppressed.

‘ You look very tired, dear,’ she observed, regarding her husband with affectionate solicitude. ‘ You had that long walk without any breakfast, and you must have gone at a great pace.’

‘ It's breakfast-time now,’ he answered. ‘ Shall you come down ?’

‘ No, I can't ; baby wants so much attention. Will you send Maggie up to me now, before you have prayers ?’

The baby seemed better throughout the day, but towards evening became very ill again, and the hearts of the parents were wrung at the sight of its suffering. However, when the doctor came again, he was still hopeful, though saying that the strain on the frail little life was very great. Hope was up all night, and looked very worn and weary the next morning ; but she did not despond, or lose heart.

‘ I think we shall bring her through,’ she said. ‘ I don't feel as if we should lose her ; I hardly think God would send us such a trial as that.’

Walter, on the contrary, was not sanguine of the baby's recovery. From the first he had somehow felt as if the call had gone forth to their little one to exchange the cross which it had borne from its birth for

the amaranthine wreath of heaven. He was affected more keenly by its sufferings than he had ever been by those of any other of his children, and, as he watched the unconscious infant, he said :

“ Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children ” —it hardly seems just or right, does it, Hope ?”

‘ But surely it’s not for our sins that this has come upon her !’ exclaimed she, looking up hastily. ‘ Oh, Walter, do you think so ? Oh, my baby ! my darling ! has all my wrong-doing caused this pain to you ?’

The sudden agony in her tone and expression was so great that her husband wished he had not mentioned the subject.

‘ Not yours, Hope,’ he answered ; ‘ but it may be mine.’

‘ Why more yours than mine ?’ she responded quickly. ‘ Oh, it can’t be, dear ! It is the consequence of the sin which she has inherited from us ; but we can’t help that. Walter, don’t look upon it as a wrathful visitation upon us ; it’s such a dreadfully gloomy idea.’

‘ I don’t look upon it as wrathful, dear ; I know there is no more *wrath* in God’s dealings with us. But it only shows the awful sinfulness of sin, when such a little innocent one as this must suffer so—and it may be,’ he added sadly, in a half-stifled voice, ‘ that He sees it necessary to correct me for my faults by the means which He knows I should feel most.’

‘ But if so, indeed, why shouldn’t He be correcting

me, too?' Hope asked. 'Oh, let me share this trouble with you, Walter! Don't think yourself alone.'

'Well, it may be so, dear; I don't see your heart as God sees it.'

'And if baby gets well again, won't it be a proof of His goodness? If "in a little wrath" He hides His face from us now for a moment, "with everlasting kindness will He have mercy on" us then.'

'Yes,' answered Walter; but he said to himself, 'Hope so evidently expects baby to recover; what will she do if it doesn't?'

Little Patience continued much the same for the next two days, sometimes a little better, sometimes rather worse, but not making any real move towards recovery. Walter found his chief solace and support in the frequent services of the week; and, on Good Friday morning, as the baby was sleeping very quietly, Hope ventured to leave it and go to church, and experienced there the truth of the poet's words, that

'The darkest hour  
That ever dawned on sinful earth  
Can touch the heart with softer power  
For comfort than an angel's mirth.'

But, at the close of the day, worse symptoms than had yet appeared exhibited themselves; and when Dr. Bell came, he looked very grave. Still, Hope did not seem to realize the extent of the danger, and when Walter went downstairs with the doctor, he said:

'My wife still hopes on, but I'm afraid there's very little ground for it, isn't there?'

‘There is a chance yet,’ was the reply; ‘but I can’t attempt to say that it is anything but the merest chance. I saw Mrs. Fenwick didn’t take it in, and I didn’t like to tell her. I’m afraid she will have to learn it soon enough; but it might break her down, and her care is absolutely necessary if the baby is to be got through, and, anyhow, to relieve it. Perhaps you will be able to prepare her for it a little. Of course, while there is life there is hope, so don’t give up altogether yet. I’ll come early to-morrow morning,’ said the kind-hearted doctor, as he pressed Walter’s hand warmly and drove away.

True to his promise, he was at the Vicarage by the time breakfast was over the next morning. After a very restless night, the baby had become quiet, and was now lying placid and apparently comfortable.

‘She must be better!’ Hope exclaimed eagerly. ‘She has been quiet now for an hour, and all the pain seems gone.’

‘Yes, there is no pain now; but I’m afraid, Mrs. Fenwick, she’s—not any better.’ Dr. Bell spoke hesitatingly, seeing the white, startled face which Hope raised to him. ‘I think—I’m afraid—there’s no chance left now.’

Hope still gazed at him; then, lowering her eyes till they rested on the little form in her arms, she gave a short cry, exclaiming:

‘Oh, it can’t be! My own, own baby! Oh, Dr. Bell, there must be *some* chance left!’

'I'm afraid not,' he replied gently. 'There was very little yesterday; but we didn't like to tell you, as you didn't seem to see it yourself. But there is not likely to be any more suffering,' he added consolingly.

'Thank God for that!' was Walter's fervent exclamation; but the mother still kept her eyes on the child, and murmured:

'No, I never expected it—I always thought she would recover; and she seemed so much better this morning. How long will she go on like this?' she asked, raising her head.

'It's just a question of time—all day, perhaps. I'll look in again.'

He gave her some directions, and went away.

'Come close to me, please, Walter,' Hope murmured, when they were left alone.

He came and put his strong arm round her, and she leant heavily against him; but she did not speak, or make any answer to his tender words of comfort. At last, in reply to some gentle inquiry, she said:

'I'm trying to give her to God. I don't want Him to have to snatch her away; it would hurt so much more.'

'No, dear; we will give her,' he answered. 'We will not offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing.'

'No,' she replied; but as she folded her arms more closely round her child and pressed it to her breast, she whispered, so low that even her husband could not

hear: 'Oh, my little Patience, what are you costing your mother now!'

'It's nearly time for me to go to church,' Walter said presently. 'What shall I say about her, dear?'

Ever since the commencement of the baby's illness, each day the prayers of the congregation had been asked for 'Patience Fenwick,' and many heartfelt supplications had gone up from those who had learnt to love the parents, and who had felt for them all along in the affliction which was laid upon their child.

'Oh, pray for her still,' Hope answered. 'God *might* even now—and, at any rate, we want her to suffer as little as possible; we want her to pass peacefully "through the grave and gate of death."'

The baby was living still when Dr. Bell came again in the evening. It had suffered no more pain, and seemed quite restful, only stirring a little occasionally. All the children had been allowed to come in and kiss their little sister before going to bed; and as Hope saw the seven little ones, who came up to her knee with grave, half-timid countenances, she felt that God was dealing very tenderly with her in only asking her to give up one of her flock. Maggie and Milford were old enough to understand what was happening, and the former's tears flowed fast, her tender heart grieving almost as much for her parents as for the baby itself.

Hope had hardly moved all day, and she and her husband sat together through the night—she some-

times singing a psalm or hymn in her low, sweet tones, or joining with him in prayer—till she persuaded him to lie down, remembering the hard work that lay before him on the morrow. In spite of his sorrow and anxiety, Walter was soon asleep, and Hope sat on and watched the first faint streak of dawn come in the eastern sky, and widen and increase in brightness; while, as the light grew stronger, the birds began to chirp from their nests among the creepers; and at last the sun burst forth and shone into the room, and all the feathered tribe began their glad Easter song of praise. “Alleluia!” sang the voices of the dawn. “Death hath no more dominion.”

The brilliant sunshine streaming through the window, where the blind had not been drawn down all night, awoke Walter, who sat up, wondering at first where Hope was, and thinking he must have overslept himself. Then he recollected all as he saw her, in her gray shawl, seated in the large armchair, and the sunbeams shining on her pale face and loosened hair, and falling on the fair head and little waxen face lying on her knee. He rose, and she smiled slightly, saying:

‘You have had a nice sleep, dear.’

‘Yes; how tired you look, Hope! Just the same?’

‘Yes; she hardly moves. It is *such* a comfort that the pain is gone!’

Walter went to the window and opened it, letting in the cool, fresh morning air and the sweet, blithe sounds from outside. He remained there a moment, leaning

out, till he heard an exclamation from Hope of 'Oh, Walter!'

Turning hastily, he saw the baby struggling a little in her arms. She was going to rise and walk about with it, but he said gently:

'I don't think it wants that, dear.'

His wife looked at him with an expression that seemed to be asking for help, and he knelt down and put his arm round her. The baby became quiet again, and, as Hope kissed its forehead, opened its eyes. They did not seek her face—it had never seen that—but gazed upwards with their unconscious expression, while a faint, sweet smile flitted over the tiny features. Hope bent down and kissed it passionately again and again, and folded her arms round it in a firm, loving embrace; but the sweet, vacant blue eyes slowly closed, and, as the tiny hands loosed their hold of her finger, the pure baby-face took a look of solemn, peaceful calm. The mother bent lower and lower, and listened at the parted lips; but there was no breath, and presently Walter raised her, saying softly:

'“Without fault before the throne of God.”'

Hope did not answer or move; her eyes were still fixed on the little face.

'Come, dear—come and lie down,' her husband said. 'You needn't stay here now.'

A sort of shudder passed through Hope's frame.

'No, no! she doesn't need me now! Oh, baby! not to need your mother! Must I part with her, Walter?'



‘You are worn out with sitting here, dear; I want you to lie down. Here is the cradle.’

He kissed the smooth brow with a loving reverence, and a tear fell on the little lifeless hand as he raised his head; then Hope knelt down and placed the tiny form in the cradle, smoothing the sheets carefully, and pressing a long, silent kiss on the soft, cold cheek. Her husband touched her, and she drew the sheet over the little face, and, rising, let him lead her to the bed.

‘Please put the cradle where I can see it,’ she said, as she lay down. He placed it near the window, and, as he rose from doing so, a deep, irrepressible sob broke from him. Hope turned her loving eyes towards her husband, and put out her hand; he took it, kissing her fondly, and then left the room.

It was sad news that met Hannah and the children when they woke; and presently the former came in and removed the cradle to another room, after Maggie and Milford had been into the garden to gather white flowers, and had strewn them over the pillow and coverlet.

It was a great effort to Walter to take his duty at church that morning; but the Holy Feast with which the day began was a great help to him, and, although the joyous words of the Morning Service at first seemed out of harmony with his feelings, before the close they had infused comfort and strength into his soul, and he was able to speak to his people out of a full heart of the glorious Easter truth, that ‘the Lord hath done

marvellous things : with His own right hand, and with His holy arm, hath He gotten Himself the victory ' over Death and the Grave. The decorations—which Maggie and Milford and the two daughters at the Church Farm had done their best to arrange the previous day—though they lacked Hope's skilful fingers to give them grace, yet, made as they were of the bright spring flowers, spoke of the awakening to new life after the sleep of the winter of death.

Hope stayed quietly in her room that day, only having the children with her to repeat their hymns and receive their Sunday instruction, which she seemed to like giving them. She was, indeed, thoroughly tired out, after the anxious days and nights of watching, and was unequal to the bustle of the children downstairs ; and Maggie proved herself a thorough little mother in keeping them quiet and preventing them from plaguing their father.

Walter wished Hope would shed some tears ; but as yet she was quite calm. When he came in from Evening Service, he found her sitting up, and she rose, saying :

' I am going to the other room, Walter ; shall you come ?'

' Had you better to-day, dear ? Isn't it too much for you ?'

' No ; please let me go—I shan't sleep at all, if I don't.'

He drew her arm within his, and, leading her across the landing, unlocked the door, and they entered.

The spring moonlight was shining through the blind, and a ray, stealing in at one side, fell in a bright stream across the flower-strewn cradle. Hope sank on her knees and drew back the sheet. The little motionless face kept its same expression of solemn peace, and for a moment the mother hardly looked sorrowful, as she gazed on the quiet features from which all signs of suffering had vanished; but then, a sudden rush of feeling came over her, and flinging herself across the cradle, she rained passionate tears and kisses on the baby-face. Walter did not disturb her for some time; but, as her frame began to shake with convulsive sobs, he raised her, saying tenderly:

‘You mustn’t stay here, dear Hope; I think you had better come away now.’

She clasped her hands tightly together, exclaiming mournfully:

‘Oh, she’s gone — gone away! What shall I do without her, my sweet baby pet?’

‘She is the first of us to enter the rest that remaineth,’ was her husband’s answer. ‘Can’t we let her go, dear? you said you would *give* her to God.’

Hope was silent for a moment; but then she bent down again, saying earnestly, between her sobs:

‘Yes, yes, I give you—I give you! my precious child! But may God comfort us for all we lose in you! Oh, Walter, if only she had learnt really to know us! My baby! my little Patience!’

‘Come, now, dear,’ her husband said, gently but firmly; and she saw that her tears were lying thick on

the marble cheek and brow. She wiped them away, saying :

‘I mustn’t spoil her with my sad tears,’ and then let Walter take her from the room. She went to bed, and cried herself to sleep, in which she lay for most of the night ; and the next morning came down to breakfast and resumed her household duties as usual. The tears of the previous night had done her good, and she looked better, though still very mournful.

The funeral was on Thursday, and Mr. Wise came from Avenham to read the service; for Walter could not trust his voice for this, and had gladly accepted his former Vicar’s kind offer. The mother’s tears flowed fast, but quietly, when the service was over, and the little white coffin, almost buried in flowers, had been hidden out of view. The sight of the empty cradle at home and the little baby-things lying about was so mournful; but her brave spirit was returning, and she set herself to her work again.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

‘Who loves the Cross and Him Who on it died,  
In every cloud sees Jesus by his side.’

*The Divine Master.*

HOPE could not, however, altogether hide or recover from the effects of the severe blow which she had sustained, and, seeing how much it had been felt by her, Walter was all the more distressed, when, in the summer, Milford must needs catch the measles from the young son of a farmer with whom he was in the habit of associating, and rapidly communicating it to all the other children, gave Hope a sick house to look after. But he was surprised to find that this seemed rather to do her good. With her old sunny smile and gentle, cheery words, she went about among the little invalids, and seemed to have a new stock of funny stories with which to amuse them when convalescent. Fortunately, none of them were at all seriously ill, except Maggie; but to have seven little people laid up almost together, was a tax on anyone; and although their mother, in her unselfish love, seemed to forget all her own troubles while they were ill, in order to soothe and enliven her

children, yet, when the need for all this exertion was over, she experienced the effects of it, and her sorrow again made itself felt.

Moreover, this spell of illness had not lightened their pecuniary cares. Hope had been obliged to take the children, when better, to a little place by the sea, not far from Cotstone, in order to recover completely ; and although the expenses there were really so small as to be a mere nothing to ordinary people, they were very far from being so to the Fenwicks. But, having once seen her spirits revive, Walter did not seem to notice that the look of wistful sadness had returned to his wife's eyes, or that her step lacked its spring and her gentle voice its joyousness of tone. He had felt his infant's death deeply ; but he could not be expected to miss such a young child in the way its mother would.

He was very glad when, in September, there came a pleasant little diversion to their thoughts in the marriage of Ada Lester with a young officer—the son of old friends of her parents. He was a fine, manly young fellow, and one who endeavoured to show by his life that it was possible for enthusiastic soldiering and earnest religion to go together, and the marriage gave universal pleasure. The Fenwicks were present at it, having come to Avenham for one night. It would evidently have been such a disappointment to Ada if Hope had not been there, that she made the exertion, on condition that she might just come quietly to the church and go away again. She was still in mourning

for her child, and, besides having nothing in which to appear on a festive occasion, she seemed, either from health or some other cause, to feel unequal to going out. A blank had certainly been made in her heart by the baby's death, and it had affected her more, perhaps, than she had been aware of at first. Not only was it because little Patience had been 'the last-born babe' that her part had lain 'deep in the mother's inmost heart,' but her blindness had called forth special feelings of tenderness; while, though dreading the time when her child would first awake to a consciousness of its sad loss, Hope had looked forward with a sort of melancholy pleasure to training it up. Moreover, this was the first real gap that death had made in her family since her marriage, and the void made itself constantly felt. There was no real baby now; for the twin girls were more than two years old, and beginning to run about by themselves, and Hope sorely missed the clinging ways of her little one. She struggled hard against the mournfulness that often tried to gain possession of her; but the presence of her children, which had hitherto been her chief solace and source of cheer amidst her various cares and troubles, now reminded her that there had been another of the little band, who had been removed from them. But she was as sweet-tempered and uncomplaining as ever; and sometimes her natural bright spirits regained possession of her, and Walter rejoiced when he heard her clear laugh ring out. It was when in repose that the change in the expression of her countenance was most

marked. It was not exactly sorrowful, and the peaceful look was even deepened ; but it seemed to overlies one that spoke of having gone through deep waters, which—though they could not touch the repose of the soul, nor dispel the ‘joy’ which no man taketh from us—had yet left behind them an ineffaceable mark.

One evening in the beginning of October, Walter and Hope, with their two eldest children, were gathered in the drawing-room after the scanty meal. A solitary candle burnt on the table, by the light of which Milford was learning his lessons and Maggie mending the gathers of Georgie’s frock, which she had torn out that afternoon in struggling through a hedge ; for the former was now, at eight years old, quite a skilful little work-woman. Their father, his hand shading his eyes, was meditating on his sermon, or some parochial matters, and Hope was mending various small garments lying beside her. The candle-light falling on her face showed all the bloom gone from her cheek, which was pale and sadly thin ; and there was a look of tender, patient mournfulness in the curve of her mouth and droop of her eyelids, below the calm white forehead. Maggie, looking up occasionally from her work, saw that the slender fingers did not move as briskly as usual, and that it seemed to be with a weary effort that her mother lifted the little garments from the table. Suddenly, Walter was startled out of his meditations by an exclamation from his little girl of ‘ Oh, mother ! Father ! look at mother ! ’

Hope’s face had become as white as a sheet—the



needle dropped from her nerveless fingers—her eyes closed—and she fell back in her chair in a dead faint.

Her husband was beside her in a moment, and the children, with terrified faces.

‘Call Hannah!’ he said, as he lifted his wife from the chair and laid her on the floor, and Milford was gone like a shot, while Maggie flew upstairs for the smelling-bottle. When she came back, Hannah was in the drawing-room, on her knees beside her mistress, who still lay motionless.

‘She’s only fainted away,’ said the good woman, seeing how frightened the children looked—‘she’s done too much, that’s what it is. There! she’s coming round now. Don’t stand too close, Miss Maggie, my dear—you keep the air from her.’

And Hope, with a long, gasping breath and a sort of shudder, opened her eyes.

‘There, dear—you are getting better,’ said Walter. ‘She had better go on the sofa now, Hannah.’

They lifted her there, and Hannah gave her some sal volatile, which she drank, and closed her eyes again.

‘Do you feel better, dear Hope?’ inquired her husband, bending over her.

‘Yes—I think I do—thank you. Better than when I fainted, at all events,’ she murmured faintly.

‘I think you will be better in bed,’ he said. ‘Will you go upstairs?’

‘Yes, please. Will you carry me?’

‘Certainly ; but do you feel so weak, Hope ?’

‘I don’t think I could walk.’ Then, seeing the children standing by her, she smiled, saying, ‘Poor chicks ! You have been frightened. Come and kiss me, darlings.’

They came and clung to her, kissing her cheek and hand, while she stroked back their hair with her feeble fingers.

‘Maggie, my child, you look very pale—it has been a shock to you. Walter, will you put out a little sal volatile for her ? and you can take that, dearie.’

She was quite herself again ; but her voice was very low and feeble, and these few words seemed to have exhausted her, for she closed her eyes again. Then her husband raised her in his arms, and Hannah helping, she was carried to her room and put to bed. But, in a short time, moans and low cries of pain began ; and then Walter came running down to the drawing-room, where the children still were, no one having recollected that it was past their bedtime, and said hastily :

‘Milford, run up to the farm, and ask one of the lads to go for Dr. Bell as fast as possible.’

‘Oh, father, is mother worse ?’ cried Maggie, clinging to him. Milford was already out of the house.

‘Yes, dear, she’s very ill ; but I hope it will come right. We’ll pray, Maggie—we know Whom to ask. But it’s past your bedtime, my child, I think,’ continued her father, looking at his watch. ‘Yes, twenty minutes to nine ! you and Milford must go, as soon as he comes back.’

‘Oh, father, we shan’t be able to sleep.’

‘But, you know, while mother is ill, you will have to be very useful; and you must sleep properly, if you are to work. Good-night, my little girl.’

He returned to his wife’s room; and Maggie put away the work her mother had left about, her tears falling on the things, and then, with her brother, went off to bed.

But the children could not sleep. Their position as the two eldest of this large family had made them old for their age, and they had already begun, in some measure, to enter into the family cares and anxieties. Hannah was busy in Hope’s room; and some of the little ones waking and beginning to cry, Maggie had to constitute herself their nurse and comforter, while Milford stood sentinel at the nursery-door, watching for the doctor’s arrival. He came at last, and Walter went down to meet him, and brought him up to his wife’s room. Then more than an hour elapsed, while Milford, enveloped in Maggie’s winter jacket over his night-shirt, was squatting on his heels in the doorway, occasionally talking in low tones to his sister, who had taken little Frank into her bed, and was sitting up there, wrapped in Hannah’s old shawl, with her chin resting on her knees. They could hear voices and steps in the bedroom, but no one came out, except once, when Hannah ran swiftly downstairs; but she did not notice Milford, and he was so afraid of being ordered into bed, if discovered out of it at that time of night, that he did not speak to her.

Suddenly, a strange, feeble cry sounded through the stillness of the night, and the children sat up and listened.

‘I don’t hear them talking now,’ Milford observed, presently.

‘Oh, Mil! then mother’s dead! I’m sure she is—and we’ve never seen her!’ exclaimed Maggie.

She had sprung out of bed, and was clinging to her brother and crying.

‘No, no, Mag!’ he answered consolingly, though his heart sank within him at his sister’s words. ‘It can’t be as bad as that; father would have called us, if it was.’

‘Perhaps so,’ replied Maggie. ‘I don’t think mother would go away without kissing us.’

‘Of course not! not a bit like her,’ Milford replied confidently. ‘Come, bundle back into bed, Peggy.’

Maggie obeyed; and, after waiting another hour, the door opened, and Walter and Dr. Bell came out together. Milford was on his feet in a moment, and the two gentlemen were suddenly confronted by the queer little figure, in gray stockings, and brown coat over a white night-shirt.

‘Hallo! what’s this?’ exclaimed his father. ‘Why, my boy, what are you doing?’

‘Oh, father! Dr. Bell! how is mother?’

Before either could reply, another small apparition came upon the scene in the person of Maggie, who could not stay in bed, and flew out in her night-gown.

‘What! you too, Miss Maggie!’ said Dr. Bell, as

she clung to her father, repeating Milford's question of 'How is mother, father?'

The doctor answered:

'Well, you've got another little brother—do you like that?'

'It was that we heard then, Maggie!' said Milford, turning to his sister.

'I suppose so,' she answered—'but mother?'

'Well, mother is ill; but I hope we shall get her right again. You needn't frighten your little selves, and you had better go to bed and sleep now. I'm going to my bed.' And, with a kindly pat to each of the small heads, Dr. Bell went downstairs.

The children, however, waited till their father came up again alone, and met him.

'Why, my little ones, you mustn't be about in this way! Maggie, you'll catch your death of cold! Have you been waiting about all this long time?'

'We couldn't go to sleep,' Maggie answered; 'but I've been in bed most of the time, and Mil has been listening at the door.'

'Poor children! were you so frightened?' said her father, stroking his little girl's soft hair. 'But now go to bed properly, dears. God bless you both—and bless us all!' he added, kissing them.

'I wish there wasn't another baby,' observed Maggie to Milford, as they retreated together. 'Mother will have to work still harder.'

'So do I,' responded her brother. 'It's really a great bore for her that there are such a lot of us.'

Walter heard the remarks, and could not help being amused; but at the same time felt saddened, at the premature knowledge of poverty and care in his children, which their words exhibited. Ah! and possibly their acquaintance with trouble might soon be extended; for Dr. Bell had not disguised from Walter, that, though there was no immediate ground for fear, yet Hope's condition might become serious. He was at the Vicarage at an early hour the next morning, and his fears of the night before were not diminished on seeing her again.

'You must be a useful little woman and look after the little ones now, Miss Maggie,' he said, meeting her in the hall. 'A great deal depends on keeping your mother as quiet as possible.'

'Then she's worse?' faltered the child, looking up with tearful eyes.

'Well, I'm afraid she's going to be rather bad, my dear; but perhaps she'll take a turn.'

But when Dr. Bell came again that evening, he found Hope very ill, and there was now no concealing the fact that her condition was a source of great anxiety.

'You must have a nurse for the baby,' he said to Walter. 'It is the only means of saving it.'

'Very well,' Walter answered. 'But where can we get one?'

'I'll get one for you. I'll telegraph from Duncombe, and she will be here to-morrow.'

'Thank you. And my wife—I'm afraid you think very seriously of her?'

‘I fear we must, now ; but she has a very good constitution, you know, and there is plenty of hope as yet. Only all the trouble of this year has been too much for her.’

‘Yes,’ sighed Walter ; and as he turned from the house-door, he recollected all the signs of weariness and grief he had seen in his wife’s countenance of late. The patient, loving spirit could not entirely support the over-strained body, and at last this had given way.

The nurse arrived the following evening, and her advent disturbed Hope a good deal, who knew how much expense in every way this would involve ; but when told by her husband that the doctor had said it was absolutely necessary for her sake and the baby’s, she assented to the measure, and seemed to find her comfort in whispering the words with which she had so often cheered herself and him—‘Our Heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things.’ And the nurse’s presence in the house, though a burden in many ways, was a help in others ; for she proved to be a truly kind-hearted woman, and, seeing the trouble that the family were in, readily gave her help in the nursing of Hope and in taking care of the children.

Walter was his wife’s chief attendant, and the feebly uttered words of patience and affection that fell from her lips occasionally during the first day or two were very precious to him ; but after that time she became much worse, and was often unconscious, besides suffer-

ing greatly. All knew now that her life was in great danger, and the darkest cloud that had ever descended upon Cotstone Vicarage now lay heavily over it. Although Hope had always been acknowledged as the sunshine and good angel of the house, yet none had ever fully realized the greatness of her influence till it was gone from them; and there was nothing to tell the children that they still had a mother except that door through which they might not enter, and past which they stole noiselessly on tip-toe. Colonel Lester and Lady Alice were in Scotland, and Jessie staying with Ada at Chatham; the Wises were also away, and Walter was alone in his trouble. Deeply did he appreciate the sympathy of his parishioners. The inquiries after Hope were incessant and affectionate, even from those who had hitherto opposed the Fenwicks, and who still held out against religion; but it was evident that the 'labour of love' that had been quietly and perseveringly carried on by the clergyman and his wife for the last nine years had had some effect, even on the hardest hearts.

For nearly three weeks Hope struggled on, with slight variations for better or worse in her condition from time to time. At the end of that period, Dr. Bell came down from her bedroom one day and met Walter at his study-door.

'My wife seems very ill to-day, I think,' said the latter. 'She's getting weaker, I'm afraid.'

'Yes,' replied the doctor gravely, and then paused.

'You think her worse?' Walter exclaimed anxiously.



‘We must have great fears for her now, I’m sorry to say. She has struggled on wonderfully all this time, and her marvellous constitution may carry her through even yet; but I must tell you that the chances are more the other way now. But don’t lose heart altogether,’ he continued kindly, as Walter turned away with a groan of misery he could not repress, and leant against the door-post; ‘the next twenty-four hours will probably decide, and she may just take the turn round the right corner.’

‘Oh, pray for us that it may be so!’ exclaimed the clergyman.

‘I will,’ the doctor replied. ‘I have learnt from you and Mrs. Fenwick the blessing of prayer, and I shall not forget you. But all hope is not yet gone; only I felt I must prepare you for what I can’t but fear will come. I have told her about it.’

When the doctor had gone Walter locked himself into his study, and sat down to try and face the great trouble that had taken hold of him as with a grasp of iron. Hope dying! It could not be. He could not believe that those soft, loving eyes might soon be closed for ever—that gentle, cheerful voice silent—those busy, helpful hands and feet still—that warm, tender heart at rest—the bright, peaceful, unselfish, Christ-like spirit fled from its earthly tabernacle. And yet the doctor’s words had been plain, and it was no dream. How could he part with her, his precious wife? In his agony the strong man bowed his head on the table before him and groaned aloud. He seemed alone in

his bitter trial ; there was no sound to be heard but the roar of the wind in the great trees outside, as they tossed their huge arms wildly about—and it seemed a fitting accompaniment to the storm that was raging in his own heart. But at last there came to his mind words which have sustained many a tried heart—‘ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble : therefore *will not we fear.*’ Walter repeated them over and over again to himself, and gradually became calmer. He had proved his Master’s love and power too often to think that He would fail them now ; and what was his love for his wife, if he could not let her go to the home to which they were both looking forward ? But, oh ! if she might be spared to him and his poor children !—and the husband flung himself on his knees to plead for this, if it might be, with earnestness that found its expression in tears.

At last he rose and went up to Hope’s room. She was seldom unconscious now ; and when he entered was lying quietly, with her soft brown hair falling on the pillow, and a few little loose waves straying over her thin white cheek. As he came up to the bed, she opened her eyes and looked lovingly at him. He bent down and kissed her, and she whispered :

‘ You know about it, dear ? We didn’t think it would come to this.’

‘ No,’ he replied, huskily. ‘ Are you content, Hope ?’

For a moment a slight shade crossed her brow ; but then she murmured :

‘ Yes—just what *He* wishes. He has taught me to

love His sweet will now.' Then, after a pause, during which the tightening pressure of her husband's hand on hers told what a sore, sore struggle it was to him to give her up, she added, 'But it is hard, very hard, to think of leaving you and the children. If I am to go, Walter, I must see them all. I have been so happy with you, dearest,' she continued, with her sweet smile, after pausing to gather strength.

'And I will let you go to be happier still with *Him*—our Beloved,' he murmured.

'Thank you, dear. But it may be His will to keep me still here; and if I am to pull through, I think I ought to be quite quiet. Besides, I can hardly do anything but just lie still and wait.'

Walter could not stand it; the faint, sweet tones, the words of quiet trust and patience, the calm and withal half-wistful look on that dear face, were too much for him, with the thought that it might all soon be gone. He dared not excite Hope by any outburst of feeling; he suddenly loosed his clasp of her hand, left the room hastily, and rushed downstairs to his study, there to struggle again alone with the rebellious feelings that threatened to get the mastery over him.

The whole of that day and night was a time of the greatest anxiety. Walter had assembled all the children to pray for their mother—as, indeed, he had often done before—and all the elder ones more or less understood the tremendous issues that were at stake. But the next morning Hope fell into a quiet sleep, and when Dr. Bell came he announced that he believed she had

taken the turn, and they might venture to hope that she would ultimately recover. The revulsion of feeling was almost as oppressive at first as the sorrow of yesterday had been; but there was still need for the greatest care and watchfulness, and the children had to be as quiet as ever. However, in a day or two it became evident that Hope was really recovering, and the thankfulness that filled all hearts was unbounded; including that of the good doctor, who had been sorely distressed at the thought of the poor clergyman and his large family being left to struggle alone in their poverty, without the wife and mother who had been the light of their humble home.

Very slowly, but on the whole steadily, Hope struggled back to life again. She had a slight relapse once, and it was three weeks after she had begun to mend before she was able to move from her bed to the sofa; but after this her progress was thoroughly satisfactory, and though still confined to her room, she soon began to try and take as much work upon herself as she could. It was very trying to one of so busy and energetic a nature to remain still when she felt her strength returning, and knew how much her presence was required downstairs; and the children hardly ever came into her room without saying, 'Oh, mother, when will you come downstairs again? we do want you so.'

But Walter kept a sharp eye on his wife, and nipped in the bud these attempts on her part to do too much.

'Now, Hope, what are you doing?' he exclaimed,

on coming into her room late one afternoon, and finding her sewing in the window by the fading light, away from the fire, and three or four of the children playing about the room. 'Sitting up, stitching away in the cold there! Leave off at once!'

'I can't, Walter—there's so much work to be done. You must let me finish this.'

'No, I shan't. How long have you been at it, I wonder?'

'Oh, I don't know exactly; but I was by the fire at first.'

'Well, I can see you have done quite enough. Does your head ache?'

'A little.'

'No wonder, with all this noise round you. Come, clear out of the room, children; and don't bother mother any more.'

'Oh, but Walter, Hannah is washing, and I had them up here to be out of her way.'

'I can't help that; you've had quite enough of them, I can see. Run away, children. Now, Hope, come and lie down quietly.'

She came, but remonstrated.

'Walter, you don't consider how no work has been done since I've been ill, and the winter has begun, one may say; and there's that beautiful lot of flannel which Mrs. Wise gave me that wants making up.'

'Yes; I almost wish she hadn't sent it you—at all events before you were strong enough to work.'

'But I am strong enough, Walter,' pleaded Hope.

'It doesn't hurt me ; and it's much worse to lie and think about all the things that are waiting for me to do.'

'You'll make yourself ill again, though, if you do so much.'

'You're rather unfeeling, Walter,' was the answer, in a melancholy tone. 'You don't seem to think how hard it is for me to sit with my hands before me now, when I am stronger, and speak as if I only did it out of thoughtlessness, or something of that kind.'

'If I gave you that impression, I'm sorry ; it's not what I meant,' he replied gently. 'Hope, dear, you have been patient all through your suffering—so patient that I have often thanked God for the excellency of His power that was seen in you ;' and he pressed his wife's hand. 'And you said—perhaps you don't remember it, but I do—when you thought you were going to leave us all, that you were content to do just what He wished ; you had learnt at last to love His will. Now, dear, I'm sure it's not His will that you should make yourself ill again ; and if He tells you to lie on the shelf a little bit longer, can't you say "Yes" to that ?'

The firelight shining on Hope's face showed sparkling drops on the long lashes as she raised her eyes to her husband's face.

I see,' she said, 'it is seeking to have my own way, after all. It does seem a little difficult to say "Yes" quite contentedly to His will in this ; but I *will* say it,' she added earnestly, 'for I can't say "No."'

‘No, that’s just it,’ Walter responded. ‘When we try how the refusal sounds, it shocks us. And you know, dear—oh, Hope, I can’t say how I long to have you about among us again! but we mustn’t run any risks of a return of illness; it has cost us all too much already.’

‘Yes, yes,’ she replied. ‘It’s quite evident that I was not yet “fair enough for Him,” since one of the first things I do, on coming back to something like life, is to grumble at what my Father tells me to do. It is so ungrateful—so *ugly* of me! I’m so sorry for it.’

‘Yes, these things are very humbling; but you are not grumbling any more now.’

‘No; and I do hope I shan’t again.’

As soon as Hope was well enough to move, the Lesters sent over their carriage, and took her back to Badgery to recruit. She remained there a fortnight; and the perfect rest and quiet, abundance of tempting food and well-warmed and luxurious house, helped on her recovery greatly, and on her return to her home she was able to take her place in the family as usual, though having still to be careful not to do too much. But the delight of Walter and the children at seeing her again at the head of the table and about the house knew no bounds; and it was as great a pleasure to Hope herself, to be again able to minister to the wants of her dear ones. The baby had grown into a healthy little fellow, and, on Hope’s return to Cotstone, the christening took place. He had waited to be publicly received into the Church, till his mother was able to be present;

and having been baptized almost immediately after his birth, there was no cause for urgent haste.

It was a pleasure to Hope, in a way, to have a baby again ; but it could not but remind her of the darling she had lost ; and the sight of the baby-features and sound of the baby-voice would often bring a look of wistful sadness into her eyes. Tenderly though she loved her new child, he could not fill the place which baby Patience had occupied in Hope's heart—that was Patience's place ; and the mother kept it as a little quiet, sacred spot, which would not be occupied again till the day when, with her blind child, she too saw ' the King in His beauty.'



CHAPTER XIX.

‘Cease we to dream. Our thoughts are yet more dim  
Than children’s are, who put their trust in Him.  
All that our wisdom knows, or ever can,  
Is this : that God hath pity upon man ;  
And where His Spirit shines in Holy Writ,  
The great word Comforter comes after it.’

*Lady of La Garaye.*

IT was with unfeigned pleasure that Ursula and her brothers again presented Walter and his wife on Christmas Day with a portion of their earnings ; and though none of the gifts were large, they were none the less acceptable. As Hope observed to her husband, in the tone of pleasantry with which she often spoke of their poverty, they could truthfully say, ‘The smallest contributions thankfully received.’ The Lesters had most generously insisted on paying for the nurse, and it was impossible to refuse such an offer ; but there were many other expenses of a very heavy nature entailed by Hope’s illness, and the Fenwicks were worse off this year than they had ever been. While his wife was laid up, Walter had been obliged to break through their rule of ‘no bills,’ in order to get things for her, for which there

was not the money to pay ; and the consequence was, that there were now several accounts waiting to be settled. Hope's health and strength came quite back to her by degrees, and she was as brisk as ever ; though she felt her labours tell rather more on her than before her illness, and headaches were more common than they had been. Perhaps these were caused by the doubly-hard struggle to keep the wolf from the door ; for though they pinched and screwed as much as was possible, in their endeavour to clear off their debts, yet, with all their efforts, the summer came and found some unpaid bills still in the drawer of Walter's writing-table.

'If only I could do some painting !' exclaimed Hope one day. 'It's dreadful to feel that I could get money, if I had the time to work. I think I *must* manage it somehow.'

But Walter interposed :

'No, Hope ; I can't have that. You slave all day, and have quite little enough sleep as it is ; and painting would mean getting up an hour earlier, I know.'

'But that wouldn't hurt me ; I sleep very well, when I do.'

'Yes, when you do—that's just it,' he answered, laughing. 'Interrupted almost every night by one or other of the children—let alone baby. No, Hope dear ; I'm sorry—for, of course, I know how you want to do anything that could help us on ; but you know you feel your work more now than before your illness,

and it would be worse than foolish to run the risk of anything of that kind again.'

'Well! I should have thought——' began Hope impatiently; but there checked herself, and answered quietly: 'Very well. Perhaps some other help will come.'

'Where from?' her husband asked.

'From Heaven,' she replied, answering his half-incredulous smile with one full of hope.

It did not seem very like help coming, though, when, the next morning, going into the study to speak to him, Hope found her husband leaning his head on his hands, with a bill lying on the table before him.

'Look here!' he said, in a despondent tone, without raising his head; 'Wilson has sent in his bill again for those repairs to the roof and pipes last winter. He writes a very civil note with it, that he would be much obliged if I could settle it, as he is rather in want of the money.'

'How much is it?' Hope asked.

'Two pounds fourteen,' answered her husband, with a sort of groan.

'Oh, Walter! how can we pay it?'

'I'm sure I don't know. What money have you in the house, Hope?'

'Only eighteen-pence,' she answered sorrowfully. 'I gave poor Mary Ann Harris a shilling just now, to get some meat for Willie.'

'I've half-a-crown here,' said the clergyman, pro-

ducing the coin from his pocket and laying it on the table.

‘I’m afraid no magic that we possess will change that into gold,’ Hope said, half smiling, but sadly.

‘I don’t see how we are possibly to pay Wilson; and yet, to feel that a man is wanting his money and can’t get it!—it’s enough to distract one.’

‘It is trying, indeed; but we’ll see if we can’t think of anything in the course of the day. Oh, I know! I must sell the rest of my jewellery.’

‘Why, you have sold a lot of that already, dear.’

‘There never was a great lot to sell,’ Hope answered, smiling. ‘However, I know most of it has gone; but there were one or two things I thought I would try to keep—things of my mother’s, like this ring,’ glancing at one on her hand; ‘but I must part with them now.’

Walter sighed; he knew it would cost his wife pain to relinquish these few ornaments—valued for the sake of the one who had worn them before her.

‘The night seems getting darker and darker,’ he said. ‘I don’t know why we should be tried so much and so continually.’

‘We cannot question God,’ was Hope’s gentle rejoinder.

‘I know we mustn’t; but I really can’t help feeling that it’s rather hard. For six years now we’ve borne poverty and illness and death, and I see you getting thin and pale; and you’re only thirty-two, aren’t you? You ought to be almost as blooming as you were ten years ago, when we married.’

‘Oh, what nonsense, Walter!’ exclaimed Hope, fairly breaking into a clear, merry laugh. ‘How can you expect a woman who has had nine children—even if her life had been perfectly easy—to look as fresh and smooth as before she had had one? And, really, sir,’ she added, in a tone of playful indignation, ‘you are not at all complimentary to your wife!—not half as much as most people, who tell me I look wonderfully fresh and *un-*faded, considering what I’ve gone through.’

‘Yes, considering that, I dare say you do,’ her husband replied, glancing at the slender, girlish figure before him, and bright eyes that looked up from a face where a pretty pink colour was now mantling in the thin cheek; ‘but still, one can see that you have evidently suffered.’

‘I have suffered,’ she answered steadily; ‘but I don’t suppose we should have been without suffering of some kind, if we had been rich. And, Walter, our troubles have been very blessed to us; I’m sure I wouldn’t have been without them—not without one, I think,’ she added, as her thoughts flew to the child she had lost.

‘No—no,’ he replied; but rather doubtfully. ‘But, really, now, I don’t know where to turn. I feel that my honour as a gentleman and a clergyman and a Christian is concerned in the payment of these dreadful bills; and yet how they are to be paid is more than I know. It’s really getting too much; it’s the last straw that breaks the camel’s back, and I can’t go on much longer.’

Hope was greatly surprised and distressed at her husband's words and tone, but thought she would try to bring him round by a little pleasantry.

'What are you going to do, then?' she inquired soberly. 'Drown yourself in Willow Pool?'

'Nonsense, Hope!' he replied sharply. 'I wish you wouldn't make it a laughing matter; it's not at all so to me, I can tell you. But it really does seem as if—as if God didn't care how much we suffer; and though I know it's very wrong of me, I can't help feeling it so.'

His tone had quite changed in this last sentence from one of murmuring and petulance to genuine sorrow, and Hope saw that the trouble was too real for any more joking.

'Oh, Walter dear, I'm so sorry! It's dreadful to feel like that,' she said, putting her hand on his shoulder. 'But pray against it, dear. Let us kneel down, and do pray; God will help you.'

'You pray. I feel as if I'd lost my hold of everything,' he said, in a dejected tone.

Together they knelt down, and Hope prayed earnestly. Too truly loving not to be faithful, she plainly acknowledged that her husband's faith had failed, but earnestly besought that it might be renewed and strengthened. Walter bowed his head on his hands in deep repentance and humility as the soft tones, sometimes broken by their fervency, fell on his ear. God seemed to speak to him with his wife's voice, and to say, 'Why art thou cast down, O soul that I have made, redeemed, helped

to this very hour ; and why art thou disquieted within thee ? Hope thou in God ; for thou shalt yet give Him thanks, Who is the help of thy countenance and thy God.'

'My precious wife ! God and I only know how you have helped me to-day !' he exclaimed, when they rose, folding her in his arms. 'By His grace I, too, will henceforth ever "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end." What should I have done if I had been left without you last year ?'

'Well, dear, I suppose God saw that you couldn't do without me just yet, and so He left me for a bit,' Hope replied, with a matter-of-fact tone and smile.

'Just yet ! Hope, you don't feel as if you had only got well for a time, do you ?' was Walter's anxious inquiry.

'No, no,' she answered quickly. 'I didn't mean anything, and you shouldn't croak so easily. Now, I'll tell you what I think you had better do. Put these bills, and Wilson in particular, out of your head for a time, and go and give Maggie her music-lesson. I want to do some washing, and shall be very glad to be relieved of her.'

'All right—I will ; and off you go, Sunshine !' And Walter kissed his wife's brow, and she vanished into the back region.

The state of the Fenwicks' affairs was so serious this year, that, after long hesitation, Walter at last decided

that for the sake of his children he must try and effect an exchange of livings. It was a hard struggle to both him and his wife to come to this decision, as their desire was to live and die in the place where they had laboured so unweariedly in the face of opposition, and where they had of late years been permitted to see some of the fruit of their toil. An exchange was not an easy matter to arrange; for if Walter found a living that would suit him, the incumbent was not one to whom he could confidently resign his flock, and *vice versâ*; and negotiations with different clergy were carried on for several months without any result, so that he at last began to believe that they were meant to remain at Cotstone, and thought of giving up his attempts to find a better living. However, he still kept his eyes open, in case anything suitable presented itself.

In the course of the next spring he was surprised at being summoned to the death-bed of a cousin whom he had not seen for years. They were about the same age, and had been at Oxford together, and great chums in those days, when Walter was not so serious-minded as now; but after his Ordination they had lost sight of each other, and had had no communication, except once, when Charles Fenwick's young wife was taken from him, and his cousin had written affectionately to him; but though his sympathy was gratefully acknowledged, there had been no desire manifested for the renewal of their former friendship. Therefore, Walter was much surprised when he received an urgent mes-



sage to come at once to his cousin, who was in a critical state. He was much affected by the meeting with his former companion, now a childless widower, struck down in the strength of his days, and shrinking from going forth into the Great Unknown, for which he sorrowfully confessed himself totally unprepared. Yet it was a pleasure to Walter to be able to prove himself now far more truly a friend than he had ever been in former years, in pointing out to his cousin the one true Way to peace.

He returned to Cotstone after the funeral, deeply touched by the warm affection with which his cousin had received him, and thankful for having been able, as he humbly believed, to bring a message of comfort to his dying friend, but not anticipating any other results from his visit—when, two days later, he received a letter from the executors, informing him of some money that had come to him from his cousin. It would only increase his annual income to a very moderate extent; but it was quite enough to relieve the Fenwicks from any further pressure of actual want, and enable them to remain at Cotstone in comparative comfort. The event was as delightful as it was unexpected, and greatly did all their friends rejoice at their good fortune; although, with their large family, there was no superabundance of wealth even now; but it put an end to what had of late years become almost a struggle for existence, and among other things enabled Walter to obtain the help of a curate, which he had for some time wished to do, as the work in his scattered parish

increased. Some money had also come to each of the other brothers and Ursula, although Walter's share was rather the largest; and the result of this was that Ursula gave up tuition, for which she was certainly not suited, but continued to keep house for her brothers. Walter and Hope were exceedingly pleased at this change for them, considering what a 'come-down' it had been for them, after their luxurious bringing-up; and especially did they rejoice for Lionel, who, when all his hopes as heir to Storr House were shattered, had so bravely and uncomplainingly set himself to work.

The three did not continue to live together much longer. Their increased means enabled Bernard to gratify his desire to devote himself altogether to painting, and he went abroad to study; and Lionel was soon after sent to Ireland, to undertake some engineering work there. Since Ursula gave up teaching, she had spent much of her time in parish-work; and being thus left alone now, she determined to devote herself entirely to this kind of life. She was very strong, and had now sufficient means to provide for herself in every way, and give pecuniary help where it was needed. Her idea was not to fix her abode anywhere, but to give temporary assistance in places where there was a want of workers; and she hoped that this plan would sometimes take her into the country—for she could not bear London. Nevertheless, her first scene of operations was a huge, overgrown parish in the East of London, with a population of the lowest and poorest classes, among whom she toiled night and day, and exercised a

great influence over many. It was very beautiful to those who had known her in former years to see the change in Ursula.

‘There is nothing attractive about her but her goodness,’ Walter said once, when telling Mr. Wise of the work she had taken up; ‘but it is the reality of her life that tells. She has grown so very thorough of late. She won’t say a thing she doesn’t feel, because she thinks she ought to say it; but when she does speak, she means what she says.’

Although she had thus given herself up to a busy life, Ursula was always at the service of her relations at Cotstone.

‘If you ever want me for anything,’ she said—‘if Hope is ill, or the children, or you want me to help in any way, remember that I am always at your beck and call.’

The remembrance of how patiently they had borne with her in years gone by, and of how much she owed to them in every way, seemed always fresh in her mind, and she felt that she could never really repay them.

It was very pleasant to Walter and Hope to feel that they might always depend on Ursula to help them in any way in her power, and they were exceedingly gratified by the eagerness shown by all their younger relations to use their increased means, not so much to add to their own comfort, as to recompense their brother and sister, in some measure, for all that had been done for them. When Bernard returned to

England, after two years spent on the Continent, he married a girl to whom he had been attached for some time, and they settled themselves in a nice little house in London ; and then he and his wife persuaded Walter and Hope to let Maggie come to them for a good part of the year, and attend an excellent school near them. She was now twelve, and needed a regular education ; but her parents could not afford a governess, and were too much occupied themselves to be able to give her all the instruction she needed ; and though they had decided to send her to school, they much preferred letting her go to her uncle and aunt, where she would still be in the shelter of a home—besides the help it was to them, with their large family to bring up, to have much of the expense of her education taken off their hands. Lionel expended part of his funds in assisting Walter to send Milford to a public school, which he had much wished for his eldest boy, but could not afford himself.

During the course of the two years before Bernard's marriage, an event took place which really and truly caused the Fenwicks as much, if not even more, joy than their own improved circumstances had given them. This was the totally unexpected restoration to health of Arthur Wise. He had been recommended to try some particular treatment, and had spent six months in London under a doctor, at the end of which time he had regained more strength and activity than he had known for years—in fact, since his accident ; and by the end of the year—although still lame, which he must

always expect to be—he was well enough to go to Oxford and begin his preparations for that object to which he had once so ardently looked forward, and which now, with returning health, again became his great desire—his Ordination.

To none of his friends, perhaps, as to Walter and Hope Fenwick, did this change in Arthur's condition and prospects cause so much joy and thankfulness; to Walter, whose close friend and 'chum' he had been in early years, in spite of the contrast in their circumstances—and to Hope, to whom he had always been as a brother, and who could trace much of the faith and bright trust that had carried her through all her trials to lessons learnt by Arthur Wise's couch of suffering. As time went on, and Arthur steadily improved in health, Hope began to observe sundry signs in his intercourse with Jessie Lester, which led her to think that his recovery might possibly lead to other results besides his Ordination.

## CHAPTER XX.

‘Yes, it is well ; for joy abides  
More steadfast if more grave ;  
The sparkling rivulet subsides  
Within the deeper wave ;  
In ways of prayer and larger thought we find  
What bliss in strength of trust o’erflows a quiet mind.’

STONE.

A LOVELY September afternoon was drawing to a close, as Hope Fenwick came down the steep lane leading from the Church Farm, walking with the light, elastic step which she still retained, although she could hardly be called girlish-looking now, woman of thirty-six that she was. Nevertheless, thin though her face and figure were, as they had been ever since her severe illness, she was in many respects still youthful in appearance, and perhaps yet more so in mind and ways ; and to-day her sweet face was even more than usually bright and sunny-looking. The evening was so lovely, that she stopped at a stile half-way down the lane, and seated herself on it, watching the lengthening shadows on the field before her, and listening to the distant voices of the village children at their play, and the other country sounds that came to her ear. At the bottom

of the field was seen the church, standing among the quiet graves, and Hope's gaze rested long on the small white cross under the east window, where little Patience had been laid to rest. Tears did, indeed, dim the mother's eyes as she gazed at it—how precious, how sacred would that little spot of ground ever be to her!—but they were hardly tears of grief; and as she looked to the blue sky above, with its tiny white clouds like the groups of cherubs in Murillo's pictures, she could almost fancy that she saw her child's form among them, and heard her infant voice in praises to Him Who had taken her to Himself, while the Sign of her redemption was yet fresh on her brow.

Hope rose presently, and continued her descent of the hill; and as she emerged into the road, she met Ursula (who was staying at Cotstone) on the Vicarage pony.

'Why, Ursula—back already! Were the Comptons not at home? But what is the matter?' she added anxiously, seeing the sad, troubled look on Ursula's face.

'Hope, who do you think I found there? Lord Dunchester!'

'My dear Ursula! how dreadful for you! What did you do?'

'I didn't know *what* to do when I saw him—I thought I should have had a fit or something; but would you believe it? he came and spoke to me in the coolest way possible! *so pleased to meet me again!*—and introduced me at once to his wife!'

'You poor dear! how could he? he really can have no feeling at all.'

‘I don’t think he can ; but, oh, Hope ! I don’t wonder when he compared us together that we seemed like Beauty and the Beast !’

Hope could not help laughing at Ursula’s quaint remark.

‘Is she so very beautiful, then ?’

‘Oh, she’s quite magnificent ! but there’s something about her face I don’t like ; she’s got a wicked eye.’

‘It sounds as if you were speaking of a horse !’ said Hope, laughing again.

‘And what do you think he began talking to me about ?—the Milborough races ! I suppose he remembered how fond I used to be of that kind of thing. So I just told him that I thought quite differently about that sort of thing now ; and I believe I did speak very strongly and plainly ; and to see his sneer ! and he went off and never spoke to me again !’

‘That was brave of you, Ursula.’

‘Oh, Hope !’ was the answer, ‘I’ve prayed for him every day for five years, and how could I help speaking to him when I got the chance ?’

‘Poor Ursula !’ said her sister-in-law, touched exceedingly by the sad longing in Ursula’s tone. ‘It has been a trying meeting to you.’

‘Yes ; happening just at the very place where he proposed to me. It isn’t that I want to have things as they were in the least, but it did seem so strange ; and oh, I’m so afraid he is utterly without any religion ! The Comptons were very kind and sorry for me ; but it is my own fault for not writing beforehand to say I



was coming over. The Dunchesters only arrived yesterday. I couldn't stay, and the Comptons quite understood it ; so I came back almost directly.'

'I am very sorry you should have had this meeting,' Hope said. 'It has quite disturbed you, hasn't it?'

'Yes, in a way it has ; it did dreadfully at the time. Do you know, as soon as I got away from the house, I just dropped the reins and cried, as I don't think I have cried since all my trouble. It was fortunate we were going up a hill, otherwise Robbie might have seized the opportunity to take liberties with me ! But I feel better by this time ; I know Who to take everything to now,' Ursula added quietly.

She had grown into a staid woman of thirty-one now, older-looking almost than her sister-in-law, with her plain, grave face, that had several lines on it, which, however, were not hardening and unpleasing in their effect, but had rather softened her features ; for they were lines not of bitterness and discontent, but of sympathy with the toiling, suffering, sinning crowds among whom her life was spent, as well as of conflicts, which had indeed left their mark, although she had come out of them victorious. She was often grave, yet not depressed ; and the certain quaintness of thought which she had always possessed frequently came out, and gave an attraction to her words and manner.

'Have you been up at the farm?' she asked of her sister, as they reached the Vicarage gate, Hope walking beside the pony.

‘Yes; I went up to see that everything was comfortable for them when they arrive. Their rooms look so nice already, and will be still prettier when they can arrange their own things. They ought to be arriving soon; isn’t that the pony-carriage coming along the valley? I do believe it is! I must stay and look at them as they go past.’

Ursula went to the stables, while Hope planted herself behind the lime-tree at the gate to watch for Arthur Wise, ordained Deacon two months before, who, with Jessie Lester as his wife, was coming to take up his abode at the Church Farm as Walter Fenwick’s Curate.

Strange as it had been to be present a year before at his marriage, and then a few weeks since at his Ordination, it seemed almost more strange now to have him coming to be their fellow-worker at Cotstone; and Hope quite fidgeted with excitement in her hiding-place. The pony-carriage drove past, and she peeped from behind the tree; but the leaves were not now thick enough to hide her from Arthur, who was looking towards the Vicarage, and he pulled up, exclaiming merrily:

‘Hope! isn’t that you there? Come out at once!’

Thus summoned, Hope emerged, laughing and blushing guiltily.

‘So this is the kind of dodge you are up to! I shall have to call you “Peeping Tom!”’ Arthur said.

‘I didn’t want to intrude on your arrival, but only to enjoy the sight of you and throw you a kiss as you

passed,' Hope said, getting up on the step to kiss Jessie and squeeze Arthur's hand.

'I think we like to see you better than anything else,' Jessie replied. 'It does seem so odd, but so very, very nice, to be coming to live here.'

'I wonder which of us is the happiest over it?' Hope said, looking from Arthur to Jessie, with a smile of great satisfaction. 'As to Walter, it has sent him quite off his head, I think. He has been cutting capers, and talking such nonsense all day, one would think he was back at Avenham with Mr. Wise! But you look rather tired, Jessie, so you had better go on to your abode.'

It was difficult to say which felt the greatest happiness, Walter or Arthur, as they entered the church together the next Sunday, united now in the same sacred calling, and the one going to be the first to train his friend in parochial work; though Walter felt that, except in the way of purely practical matters, there was little that he could teach Arthur. And as the latter that evening preached his first sermon in Cotstone Church, and, looking at the well-filled seats before him, contrasted the scene with what he knew his Vicar's eyes had rested on fourteen years before, he felt that here, of all places, he ought to learn fresh lessons of faith, hope, and love.

'It seems almost like a dream,' Hope observed to her husband, meeting him at the gate, when he came from church. 'To see Arthur as a clergyman is strange enough—and now, your Curate!'

‘It isn’t a dream, though, I’m glad to say. Oh, Hope! are not all these mercies we have had in the last few years “clear shining after rain”?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, with her bright smile. ‘God has never, never failed us in any way; and though we still pray it, I think we may say as a fact—mayn’t we?—that “the God of hope has filled us with all joy and peace in believing”?’

“The God of hope,” Walter repeated; ‘I wonder if I may take it in that way—*your* God, Hope. I’m sure, if I had been an infidel, I must have been won to the God you worshipped, by seeing what He evidently was to you.’

‘You think too much of my life, dear Walter,’ Hope replied; ‘but I have always longed to show, and I do want to tell everyone still more now, that my God is worthy to be loved and served.’

‘He is worthy,’ Walter said earnestly. ‘After all, that is all one can say, when one sees what His grace does for anyone—when we look at the parish, for instance—and we look forward with the hope of joining one day in the song, “Thou art worthy, O Lord.” We’ll sing some bits from the “Messiah” this evening.’

THE END.

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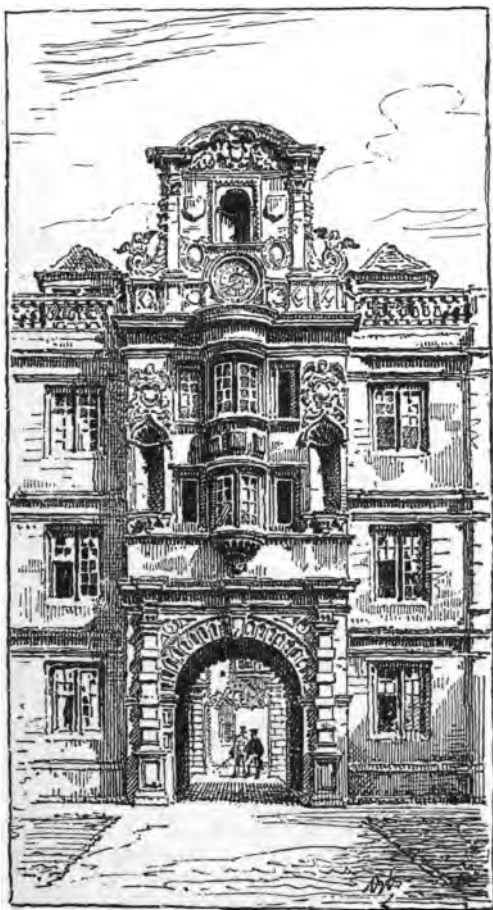


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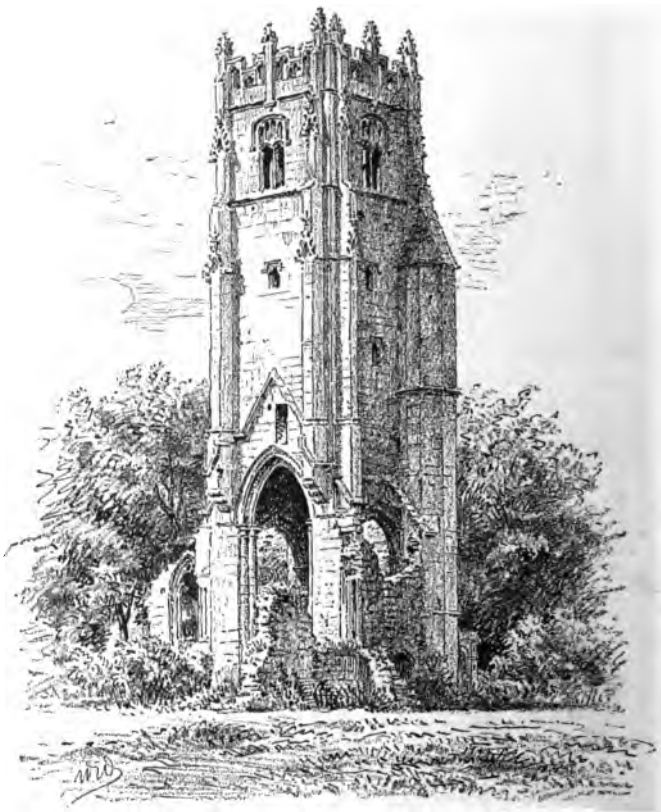
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